

*(For restricted circulation)*

# **BONDED LABOUR IN PALAMAU**

## **A STUDY IN AGRARIAN RELATIONS**

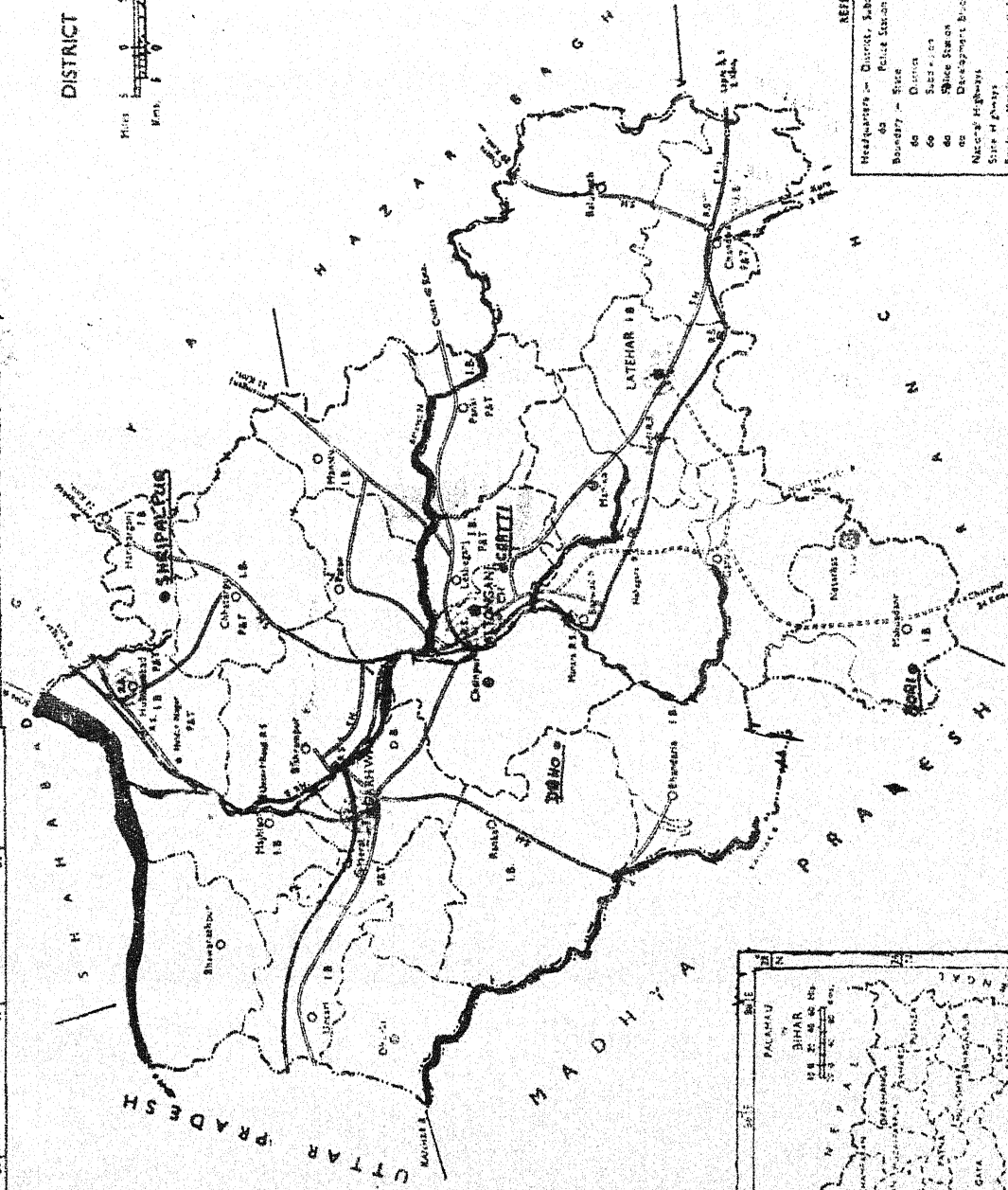
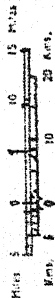
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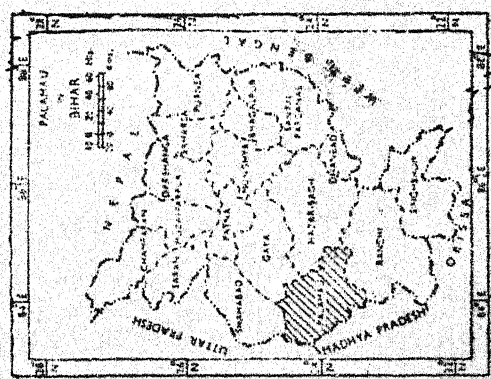


# DISTRICT PALAMAU



## REFERENCES

Headquarters - District, Subdivision	
Boundary - State	
60 District	
60 Sub-division	
60 Police Station	
60 Development Block	
National Highways	
State Highways	
Roads - Metalled, Unmetalled	
Railways with Station (Broad Gauge)	
Railways with Station (Meter or Narrow Gauge)	
River or Stream	
Canal with Distribution and Lock	
Town	
Village having population 5,000 and above	
Hospital	
Post & Telegraph Office	
Airplane - Dist. Inspection, Const.	
Circuit House - Rest House	





F O R E W O R D

To forge closer links between policy making and administration on the one hand and academic research on the other is a continuing effort at the Indian Institute of Public Administration. Our studies in rural systems form an important component of this effort. Along with studies of rural development programmes, field administration and systems of agricultural production, the Rural Studies Division of the I.I.P.A. has been increasingly engaging itself in the study of agrarian relations. For it is evident that in a country like India no design of development can work unless it is tempered by a firm grasp of this larger social matrix.

The present study by Dr. Mundle, who is presently co-ordinating the activities of our Rural Studies Division, is a contribution to this effort. At one level the study demonstrates the immediate, practical relevance of the method of political-economy in analysing the problem of bonded labour and formulating a workable policy to curb the incidence of bondage. At another level, in establishing that bondage in Palamau district is not a remnant of the feudal past but rather a product of the penetration of commercialism and the profit calculus in a backward agriculture, the study also constitutes an important intervention in the

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current debate among social scientists in India and elsewhere about the nature of our agrarian structure. It is my belief, therefore, that the study will evoke as much interest among social scientists as among professional administrators and policy-makers.

R.N. HALDIPUR  
DIRECTOR, I.I.P.A.

P R E F A C E

The original idea of the present study emerged in the course of discussions at a camp for freed bonded labour in the village of Semra in Palamau towards the end of March, 1976. The next year passed in exploring ways and means of bringing the idea to fruition. Finally the project got off the ground with a financial grant from the Ministry of Labour of the Government of India thanks largely to the initiative of Prof. R.N. Haldipur, our Director at the I.I.P.A. and Shri D. Bandhopadhyay who was then Joint Secretary in the Labour Ministry. Actual work started around July, 1977.

It was evident from the very beginning that the phenomenon of bondage could not be studied in isolation. A proper analysis would have to look at land, labour and credit relations as a whole along with the underlying process of agricultural production. Since the resources at our disposal, both in terms of money as well as manpower, were limited and since we were working within the restricted time budget of about a year, it was decided to concentrate our resources in a single district where the bonded labour problem was severe rather than spread it thin between different pockets dispersed across the country. Thus instead of an

extensive survey on limited aspects, leading to some simple general conclusions, we opted for an intensive micro level study aimed at a more comprehensive understanding of the problem, though admittedly this would not allow for wide generalisations beyond the region concerned.

Applications of the method of political economy in micro level empirical studies is a relatively recent phenomenon in this country. As such our method of study was frequently groping and experimental. Two village level studies which we found particularly useful in this context are the recent contributions of Breman (1974) and Djurfeldt and Lindberg (1975) which combine intensive fieldwork with historical research based on archival materials. During field work data was collected in two stages, on the basis of structured questionnaires, from all households in four selected villages. The villages themselves were selected purposively to cover tribal and non-tribal regions as well as the main geographical regions within the district (see map) and also ensure some spread in terms of the levels of development, differentiation and so on. At the first stage a common questionnaire was circulated to all households in a village. The basic information in these questionnaires was then processed to identify and classify all

households according to their major economic roles i.e. malik households, mazdoor households and kisan households. Different sets of questionnaires were then canvassed among all households in these three different classes of households. A separate questionnaire was used to collect additional information from a small sample of bonded labour households spread over twenty four villages in the district including the four mentioned above.

The data so collected mainly related to different economic aspects of these households as consuming units on the one hand and producing and/or labouring units on the other i.e. asset position, production, employment, income, consumption, expenditure, debts, credits etc. It should be emphasised here that canvassing of structured schedules or questionnaires, even when pretested, is not necessarily the best method of collecting data in studies of this nature. This is partly because the categories and concepts which are real for most of us, either in our daily lives or professional work, sometimes just do not operate in a rural context. No amount of pretesting and revision of questionnaires can altogether eliminate this distance in culture and experience. As such there is always the danger of imposing categories which are not



valid. Of taking pictures through a distorted lens. Partly this is also because much of the required information has to do with relations and structures which need not necessarily be captured or discovered in schedules of responses to pre-arranged questions. The best way out is perhaps to simply dig in in the village and observe - with a check list at the back of ones mind - like the social anthropologists have always done. This is what we had wanted to do as an alternative source of evidence to check against the data recorded in the schedules. Unfortunately the extremely limited time available at our disposal made this impossible. As it was our research team of three persons was able to spend a total of barely 360 mandays on the field.

But this period in the field, limited as it was, was invaluable in equipping us to judge the quality of the questionnaire data. Since the total number of households was not very large in any of the four villages, it was usually possible to screen the questionnaires at the village itself and verify responses which looked questionable. At a later stage responses to different but related sets of questions were cross checked for their consistency. Despite all this 'cleaning' important items of data remained which were



suspect in our own judgement. In such cases we simply chose to discard the data.

Where relations and structures are integral elements of a system in motion, a dynamic process through time, an enquiry into its history is essential for an adequate understanding of the system. In attempting to understand this system purely on the basis of contemporary data, however collected, there is always the danger of seeing facts in a false perspective. Accordingly the data collected from the field had to be supplemented by considerable research on reconstructing Palamau's economic history. Most of this is background material which has not been incorporated in the report. But the efforts was well rewarded for it was this enquiry into the past which threw up important clues leading to what we hope is a correct understanding of the present. Three recent studies which we found particularly useful in sifting and understanding this material are the contributions of Benoy Choudhury (1975), Jairus Banaji (1977) and Ghosh & Dutt (1977).

The above description of method already indicates some limitations of the present study. In addition it is important to mention that there are a number of questions which ought to have been pursued but which we either did not take up at all or did not follow

through adequately. Some aspects have not been properly documented. On other aspects the data has been hurriedly assembled or analysed crudely. These limitations were to some extent unavoidable given the constraints under which we had to work, the most severe being that of time.

Perhaps in attempting to pursue our own academic preoccupations within the framework of a time bound project, commissioned with a very limited and specific purpose in view, we have fallen some where between the two.

The plan of chapters is as follows. Chapter I briefly reviews the history of Palamau's economic development and presents a statistical account of the district. A general description of the selected villages is also included here. Chapter II presents the data on distribution of land and other assets in the selected villages. While the household is the ultimate economic unit here as well as in subsequent chapters, differentiation is represented between as well as within individual classes. The classes themselves are identified with reference to the labour - capital relationship. The same scheme of classes is used in Chapter III which summarises data on the economic functioning of different classes i.e. production, labour and consumption. Consolidated household budgets of income and expenditure are also presented here which show up surplus and deficit categories

of households. Against the background of these earlier chapters the phenomenon of bondage itself is analysed in Chapters IV and V. Chapter IV presents the basic analytical framework and also gives a historical account of the origin of debt-bondage in Palamau. The empirical evidence on different aspects of the contemporary structure of bondage is put together in Chapter V. The last section of this chapter (3.3) on 'Motivations for Holding Bonded Labour' is especially important for it contains the core of our own analysis of the phenomenon of bondage. The last chapter attempts to formulate a framework of policy based on the analysis which precedes it and suggests a specific package of interventions which would atleast minimise the incidence of bonded labour even if the system cannot be altogether eliminated in the short run.

The study is a result of the cooperative effort of three persons. Bikramaditya Singh, Basuki Nath Singh and myself. To both S/Shri B.D. Singh & B.N. Singh I am deeply indebted for their able research assistance throughout the duration of the project. Much of the field data was collected and processed by them. But beyond this their own personal familiarity with rural society in Bihar has protected me from blundering down many false alleys. We were also helped in our work by

my friends Hironmoy Dhar, P.P. Ghosh and Nirmal Sengupta of the A.N. Sinha Institute at Patna, Sanjay Mitra and Arvind Das all of whom took time out to join us at different stages of our field work. I learned much from our many, and frequently violent, discussions late into the Palamau nights.

Some aspects of the study were discussed in two seminars at the Indian Institute of Public Administration in March, 1978 and at the Centre for Development Studies, Trivandrum, in May, 1978. I am indebted to participants at these seminars for their suggestions and comments. I <sup>also</sup> would/like to acknowledge useful discussions with Jairus Banaji, Amit Bhaduri, Niladri Bhattacharjee, K.G. Iyer, A.V. Josh, N. Krishnaji, R.N. Maharaj, Pradhan Prasad, Teodor Shanin, Dilip Simeon & Harsh Sethi.

For help with arrangements during field work we are grateful to a large number of officials in Palamau district from Karamcharis at the village level to a succession of three different Collectors at the district headquarters. We would also like to thank Shri V. Chandra Mowli and Shri K.D. Gandhi at the Labour Ministry, Shri B.N. Yugandhar and Shri K.B. Saxena for extending their cooperation at different stages of our work. At the I.I.P.A. I would particularly like to thank Shri Ashok Kumar Taneja who typed several drafts of

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the entire manuscript, the Finance and Administration units who administered the project and the Training and Publication units who were responsible for the production of the report. Finally I would like to thank our Director, Shri R.N. Haldipur, for his personal interest and encouragement throughout the duration of the project. But for him it might not have been possible to take up the study at all.

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## CHAPTER-I

### PALAMAU: THE DISTRICT & SELECTED VILLAGES

#### 1. HISTORICAL BACKGROUND<sup>1</sup>

##### 1.1 Early History

Located at the western edge of the South Bihar Plateau, beyond the Southern banks of the river Sone, the area around Palamau was originally inhabited by the Dravidian tribes. It was first colonised from outside by the Oraon & Kharwar tribes and later the Cheiros.

The recorded history of Palamau begins with the rise of Muslim influence in the area which coincided more or less with the rise of the Cheiro Kingdom from around the late 16th century. Though Akbars Rajput general Man Singh had actually annexed the area and settled his Rajput troops and their Brahmin priests there in 1574 the region was soon overrun by the Cheiros who ruled the region for the next two hundred years. Of course while the Cheiros & Kharwars were numerically and politically dominant; the Rajputs, Brahmins and Muslims who had arrived in the wake of the Moghul invasion continued to hold positions of importance among the ruling feudal elite.

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1. This section has drawn heavily from Sudipto Mundle - Palamau: Development in a Historical Perspective (mimeo) 1978. For references to sources of facts and figures see the above mentioned paper.

Without direct Moghul rule, Todar Mal's land settlement was never introduced in the area. Cultivation rights were parcelled out by the king to village headmen who in turn distributed these rights among the peasants of the village. The rights were granted against a thika or rent though this was fixed quite arbitrarily without much reference to the size or quality of land. However the Moghuls, who looked upon the area as an autonomous territory of a vassal chief, imposed a Peshkash (tribute) on the area which was fixed in money terms. Thus the region was not entirely innocent of the nexus of money though the development of exchange and commerce which usually accompanies the development of money was missing except for local town: Countryside trade to support the population in the capital.

The Moghul tribute was seldom paid inspite of numerous expeditions by the Subhadars at Patna even at the height of the empire. This tenuous link was eroded further with the decline of Moghul power. And during this period of declining Moghul power there was the growth of a number of autonomous Jagirdars in the area and numerous sub-tenures including the occasional Ijara-baipattas or outright sales of land. Thus while it would be too much to see in this the growth of a market for land, it is evident that atleast the concept of land as

a saleable commodity had already appeared by the late 18th century.

1.2 Colonial Control and Consequences  
of the Leslie Settlement

It was this situation of a power vacuum, Balkanisation and frequent plots and feuds among the nobility and the royal family which the British used as a convenient opportunity to penetrate the area. In ~~1870~~ 1770 the British agent in Patna installed Gopal Rai of the Babuan, or younger branch, of the ruling Cheiro family as king in exchange for an annual tribute of Rs.12,000. Of course the primary British interest in this territory was military rather than economic. Palamau formed a frontier against Mahratta inroads into the Bengal Presidency. Nevertheless a number of administrative and revenue experiments were tried to settle the area, none very successfully. Even the Permanent Settlement could not be extended to the Chotanagpur territories since their indigenous land systems were quite distinct.

Finally Palamau was given a settlement of its own, originally introduced by Leslie in 1786, which proved disastrous for the tenantry. Under this the Jagirdars' obligations to the Cheiro king were very limited and fixed. On the other hand their claims from the tenants were not sought to be controlled in any way.



Inevitably there was tremendous rackrenting and the Jagirdars grew to be loyal British subjects enriching themselves by the day. On the other hand the Cheiro king was soon driven bankrupt and the tenantry was steadily pauperised leading to a series of terrible famines beginning around the middle of the 19th century. Resistance in the form of militant peasant movements had of course started much earlier with the Cheiro uprising of 1800. This was followed by a whole series of such movements finally culminating in the war of 1857. Interestingly this war was fought in Palamau by the Palamau tenantry, allied to the dispossed Cheiro king and other Cheiro and Kharwar leaders, on the one side and the British with their loyal Hindu and Muslim Jagirdars on the other.

### 1.3 Integration, Growth of Capital and Labour Migration

The period of fifty to sixty years following the 1857 war as a period of rapid transition in Palamau. Given the important role of Palamau in the 1857 war, the colonial government made a determined bid to consolidate its control over the region. This entailed not only a stronger administration - Palamau was made a separate subdivision immediately after the war and by 1892 it had become a full district-but also improvement of communication, roads etc. and generally a closer integration



with the rest of the Bengal Presidency and especially the Calcutta port.

Two important consequences followed. Monetisation, which had already been enforced by the money rent obligation of the Leslie settlement, was now followed up by the rapid spread of merchant and money lending capital. Capital even moved into manufacturing such that by the time of the 1891 census it was supporting nearly 13% of the district's population through employment in nearly sixty different branches of manufacturing and processing industry. On the other hand there was a large scale exodus of labour. The heavy burden of the Leslie settlement had left the tenantry totally impoverished and the latter half of 19th century witnessed, as we have mentioned above, a series of terrible famines in Palamau. But the improvement of communications and road connections now linked up the area with the growing labour markets, especially in the tea districts of North Bengal and Assam and thus provided an alternative source of subsistence. At the time of the 1891 census roughly 1% of the population was emigrating every year. By 1921 the rate of migration had come down, but the district was still losing labour at the rate of 5,000 persons per year.

/the

#### 1.4 Expropriation and Debt Bondage

Along with the growth of capital and exodus of labour at the turn of the century, Palamau also saw a major transformation in the structure of land relations. The Permanent Settlement reached Palamau in the form of an ordinance in 1895 which converted all the then existing tenures into permanent, heritable, transferable and non-resumable estates. Land now became a piece of private property saleable on the market like all other commodities. At the same time there were a series of spurts in agricultural prices starting around 1901 which made land an attractive investment in the asset portfolio. On the one hand this resulted in a substantial development of agriculture itself - on expansion of acreage, irrigation etc. On the other hand it resulted in expropriation. Capital was now moving into land and with the new merchant or money-lender landowners wanting to buy land the actual cultivating tenant was being frequently alienated from his land. So much so that alienation had to be specifically banned under the Chotanagpur Tenancy act of 1908. This act also required the preparation of land records with the recorded names and rights of individual tenants. The settlement under the act was finally completed by 1920. And to a large extent this checked the expropriation of the tenants and potential differentiation.

Furthermore, the growing penetration of capital into land was also accompanied by the rise of debt bondage. As we shall see below in chapter-4, the Kamiuti system of debt bondage originated towards the end of the 19th century in the wake of capital penetrating into agriculture. Right from its outset capital encountered a severe shortage of labour in agriculture - the absence of an army of agricultural labourers. The density of population in Palamau is in any case extremely low. Those sections of the impoverished tenantry who were expropriated from the land were soon picked up by the garden sirdars and exported to the tea district. In consequence the size of the available labour force was limited and without a special system of controls the wage rate would have risen sharply. This could not be tolerated by the employers - new merchant/usurer landowners as well as land lords on their directly cultivated land - especially in view of the extremely low productivity in Palamau. The entire system of labour relations came to rest, therefore, on the arrangement of debt bondage - the dependence and control of labour through indebtedness.

The settlement of 1920, by arresting the process of expropriation and differentiation, merely served to reify and perpetuate the system. And while the production

base of agriculture stagnated, the system came to rely increasingly on squeezing absolute surplus from labour through debt bondage.

### 1.5 Changes after Independence

Even during the last decades of the colonial period, peasant demands were increasingly articulated through the national movement in Palamau as in other parts of the country. And the installation of an independent national government immediately placed land reforms on the policy agenda. However it was not until 1955 that the land reforms could be legally implemented in Bihar and by then a second great spurt of tenant eviction had already occurred. However this second spurt of expropriation was also followed by some leveling of the largest estates in the land reform such that after the reform the peasantry was not more but less differentiated than before. To that extent the post-colonial land reform merely extended the effects of the 1920's settlement - the perpetuation of a backward structure of agrarian relations based on agriculture stagnant at a low level of productivity.

However alongside land reforms, development programmes of the national government have ushered in a period of profound changes in the material basis of agricultural production. Their limitations not with-

standing these programmes have introduced a period of growth and technological modernisation hitherto unknown in Palamau.<sup>2</sup> Furthermore the post independence period has also seen an acceleration of population growth<sup>3</sup> resulting in a fundamental change in the land: labour coefficients and a process of 'demographic differentiation' through partitioning of land. And it is not too difficult to foresee that these two fundamental elements of change may soon lead to a transformation not only of the material basis of agricultural production but agrarian relation as well.

## 2. SOIL, CLIMATE AND TOPOLOGY

### 2.1 Topography

Lying between 23 20' & 24 39' North latitudes and 83 22' & 85 00' East longitude the district is a rough parallelogram stretching 119 miles from North to South and 101 miles from West to East. It is covered, except in the extreme North which borders the river Sone, by lines of low rolling hills running East to West. The entire area is drained by the river Koel, which bisects the district from North to South, and its two main tributaries the Auranga and the Amanat.

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2. See section 4 below in this chapter.

3. See section 3 below in this chapter.

## 2.2 Soils

According to a recent report<sup>4</sup> there are 17 different soil types in the district but these have been classified into five major groups.

- Group-I        - Shallow, well drained soils found in upland to medium upland zones.
- Group-II       - Reddish brown upland soils underlain by rocks or morrum, rapidly eroding, and slightly acidic to neutral. Sustains forests and hardy, drought resistant crops.
- Group-III      - Medium light to heavy soils. Underlain by heavy soils, generally neutral in reaction and average to good in fertility, found in the northern parts of the district.
- Group-IV       - River valley soils of varying colours. Medium deep to deep and neutral to slightly alkaline in reaction. Highly fertile and suitable for intensive cultivation.
- Group-V        - Moderately alkaline soils with high calcium carbonate contents found in northern part of Hussainabad block.

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4. Preliminary Project Report for D.P.A.P., Palamau, Deptt. of Agriculture, Bihar Government.



### 2.3 Climate

Generally dry and bracing, the temperature in the area sometimes goes down to freezing point in the coldest months of December and January. The hottest days are recorded in May and June when the mercury goes up to as much as 116 F. Daily variations in temperature are of 6° C to 8° C in the monsoon months but may go up to as much as 16° C to 17° C during the winters and summers.

Rainfall in the district varies between 1,079 mm in Hussainabad in the extreme north to as much as 1,817 mm in Netarhat in the south, the average annual rainfall for the district working out to 1,335 mm per annum. The average rainfall data for the decade 1961-70 is given in Table 1.21 below. However the average rainfall has little meaning since high year to year variability of rainfall is the most marked feature of the districts climate. More importantly, almost every alternate year there is subnormal rain in the critical months of the agricultural season, thus resulting in droughts.

## 3. DEMOGRAPHIC TRENDS AND OCCUPATIONAL DISTRIBUTION

### 3.1 Population Size, Growth & Density

Total population in the district which was enumerated at about 5.5 lakhs in the 1981 census had grown

TABLE - 1.21RAINFALL IN PALAMAU DISTRICT 1961-1970

NORMAL DISTRICT AVERAGE: 1335.1 mm			
YEAR	ACTUAL RAINFALL AVERAGE	YEAR	ACTUAL RAINFALL AVERAGE
1961	1567.8	1966	638.3
1962	1026.4	1967	1130.6
1963	1087.8	1968	817.7
1964	1377.5	1969	1032.6
1965	1068.8	1970	1253.8

Source: D.P.A.P. Project (Preliminary) Report.  
Bihar Government, 1972.

to 1.5 million persons by 1971 as indicated in table 1.31. Annual rates of growth were generally less than 1% prior to 1931. It accelerated to over 1.1% in the 1931 and 1941 censuses and after a slump in 1951 again started accelerating to reach nearly 2.7% in 1971. This is more than the Bihar average of about 2.1%. The density of population which was only 112 per square mile in 1881 has increased monotonically to reach the level of 304.64 per sq. mile in 1971. However this is still far below the Bihar average (1971 census) of 829 per sq. mile.



TABLE - 1.31

POPULATION GROWTH AND DENSITY IN PALAMAU

YEAR	POPULATION	ANNUAL GROWTH	DENSITY PER SQ. MILE
1881	551,075	-	112
1891	596,770	0.89	121
1901	619,600	0.38	-
1911	687,267	1.09	140
1921	732,902	, 0.66	149
1931	818,212	1.16	-
1941	912,143	1.00	186
1951	975,767	0.80	201
1961	1,187,789	2.04	242
1971	1,504,350	2.67	304.64
Bihar			
1971	56,353,369	2.13	829

Sources: Survey & Settlement Report, D.H.E. Sunder, p.18; Census of India 1911, Vol.1, pt.II, District Census Hand Books since 1951, District Gazetteers.

### 3.2 Rural Urban Distribution and Social Characteristics

As shown in table 1.32 the share of rural population which was as much as 99.1% in the 1881 census has gone down only marginally such that even in 1971 95.3% of the population remained rural. This is higher than the average of 90.0% for Bihar as a whole.

In terms of the sex ratio the male population has been growing faster than the female population. Hence while it accounted for less than half of the total (49.6%) in the 1881 census it had caught up with the female population in the 1921 census and by 1971 it accounted for 50.9% of the total population. However this is still well below the ratio for the state in which males account for 56.7% of the total population.

The rate of literacy recorded in 1901 was 2.26% of the total population. This remained nearly stagnant, going up to only 2.77 by 1931. Thereafter the literacy rate accelerated, reaching 7.31% in 1941 and 16.41% by 1961. In 1971 it stand at 15.10% as compared to 19.9% for the whole state. In terms of the distribution of population by caste and tribe status scheduled castes make up about 25.93% of total population and scheduled tribes about 19.34% such that the socially depressed groups as a whole make up about 45% of the total population.<sup>5</sup>

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5. See K. Suresh Singh, The Indian Famine, 1967. Peoples Publishing House, New Delhi, 1975.

TABLE - 1.32RURAL URBAN DISTRIBUTION AND SOCIAL  
CHARACTERISTICS OF (PALAMAU) POPULATION

(% of total population)

Year	Males	Females	Rural	Urban	Literacy
1881	49.6	50.4	-	-	-
1891	49.3	50.7	99.1	0.9	-
1901	49.5	50.5	98.48	1.52	2.26
1911	49.7	50.3	98.35	1.65	2.07
1921	50.1	49.9	97.35	2.65	2.76
1931	50.1	49.9	97.07	2.93	2.97
1941	50.1	49.9	97.52	2.48	7.31
1951	50.5	49.5	96.2	3.75	7.80
1961	50.4	49.6	95.27	4.73	16.41
1971	50.9	49.1	95.3	4.7	15.10
Bihar					
1971	56.7	43.3	90.00	10.00	19.9

Source: Survey & Settlement Report, D.H.E. Sunder, p.18;  
Census of India, 1911, Vol.1, pt.II, District  
Census Hand Books since 1951 and District  
Gazetteers.

### 3.3 Occupational Distribution

The broad distribution of population (or workers) by sectors of economic activity in different census years has been reproduced in table 1.33. It would be incorrect to draw fine comparisons even between the recent censuses because of the conceptual changes between different censuses. This is especially true in the case of 1921 for which year we do not know the procedures followed for summarising the census data in the district gazeteer. But in broad terms we may say that agriculture has supported (employed) around 90% of the total population (workers) in the district. This is probably true also in 1921 where there is an unusually large share of the 'other services' sector, a very large part of which should actually be treated as belonging to agriculture. However even after adjustments it is difficult to explain away the relatively larger share of industry mining etc. in 1921 as compared to later years. In 1971 agriculture had a larger share while each of the other sectors had a slightly smaller share in Palamau compared to Bihar state and even more so compared to the rest of India, indicating that Palamau is at an earlier stage of industrialisation compared not only to the rest of the country but even Bihar itself.

TABLE - 1.33

Occupation Distribution in Palamau

	% Shares								
	P	A	L	A	M	A	U	BIHAR	INDIA
	1921	1951	1961	1971				1971	1971
AGRICULTURE & ALLIED ACTIVITIES	71.6	91.1	86.8	89.8				83.2	72.1
INDUSTRY MINING & QUARRYING	6.4	2.7	4.8	3.6				7.1	11.2
COMMERCE & TRANSPORT & COMMUNIC.	4.1	2.5	2.3	3.1				4.8	8.0
OTHER SERVICES, PROFESSIONS ETC.	17.9	3.7	6.1	3.5				4.9	8.7

NOTE: Figures are taken from the District Census Handbooks in all years except 1921 for which data is from the District Gazetteer of 1926. Percentage shares are of total population in 1921 & 1951 and of total workers in 1961 & 1971.

#### 4. IRRIGATION & AGRICULTURE

##### 4.1 Land Utilisation

The extension of cultivation between selected years since 1911 has been reproduced below in table 1.41. It will be noticed that while the net area sown has gone up by nearly 40% between 1921 & 1975-76, the bulk of the expansion has actually occurred in the post colonial period. Over the same period the gross area sown went up by over 47% such that there has been some increase in the cropping intensity. However there have been wide year to year fluctuations and no clear trend is evident. On the average the intensity of cropping has varied between 115% to 120%.

TABLE -- 1.41

##### Land Utilisation in Palamau

('000 acres)					
Year	Gross Area Sown	Net Area Sown	Year	Gross Area Sown	Net Area Sown
1911	386	-	1970-71	835 (124.4)	671
1921	619 (111.5)	555	1971-72	-	697
1931	779 (119.3)	653	1972-73	851 (116.3)	732
1941	600 (126.6)	474	1973-74	848 (114)	744
1951-52	738 (118.1)	625	1974-75	871 (116)	751
1961-62	932 (121.5)	767	1975-76	914 (118.4)	772

Source: Annual Season & Crop Reports & Bihar Statistical Handbook. For 1911 the figure is from K. Suresh Singh - The Indian Famine 1967. People's Publishing House, New Delhi, 1975. Figures in parenthesis give the ratio of gross sown area to net



In terms of overall land utilisation recent unpublished data from the office of the divisional commissioner, Ranchi, indicates that apart from the net sown area of 727 thousand acres, which accounted for 23% of the districts area in 1976-77, another 23% was cultivable waste including current fallows. Of the remaining about 48.4% was forest land and 5.6% uncultivable waste.

#### 4.2 Irrigation

Alongside the expansion of acreage there has been an even larger expansion of area under irrigation. Thus between 1921 & 1975-76 while the net sown area went up by 40% the area irrigated increased by around 105% such that the ratio of irrigated area to net sown area went up from around 16% in 1921 to about 24% in 1975-76, nearly 90% of the total irrigated area being under paddy.

This expansion of irrigation, as indicated in table 1.42, has once again occurred mostly during the post-colonial period. As the table further indicates, over a quarter of the total irrigated area is in the command of wells and tubewells while somewhat less than a quarter is covered by canals (mainly government) and tanks. The remaining fifty percent or so is covered by other sources including waterfalls, ahars, bundhs etc.

TABLE - 1.42

GROWTH OF IRRIGATION RESOURCES IN PALAMAU

(in acres)

YEAR	CANAL		Tanks	WELLS		Other Sources	Total
	Government	Private		Tube-wells	Other Wells		
1911	-	-	200	-	5,000	55,800	61,000
1921	-	-	80,378 (14.48)	-	7,486 (1.35)	2,177 (0.39)	90,041 (16.22)
1931	-	-	81,176 (12.43)	-	7,486 (1.15)	1,874 (0.29)	90,536 (13.86)
1941	-	-	81,176 (17.12)	-	7,486 (1.58)	1,874 (0.40)	90,536 (19.10)
1951	-	41 (0.006)	40,426 (6.47)	-	18,677 (2.99)	12,618 (2.01)	71,762 (11.49)
1961	3,153 (0.41)	27 (0.003)	89,156 (11.62)	12 (0.001)	19,600 (2.56)	30,788 (4.01)	1,42,736 (18.61)
1972-73	10,174 (1.39)	-	12,288 (1.68)	13,685 (1.87)	23,646 (3.23)	1,06,978 (14.61)	1,66,771 (22.78)
1973-74	12,835 (1.73)	4,728 (0.64)	12,531 (1.68)	11,963 (1.61)	23,081 (3.10)	1,01,072 (13.58)	1,66,210 (22.34)
1974-75	18,300 (2.44)	110 (0.01)	13,163 (1.75)	15,413 (2.05)	25,468 (3.39)	86,172 (11.47)	1,58,626 (21.12)
1975-76	20,048 (2.60)	625 (0.08)	21,119 (2.74)	11,851 (1.54)	37,063 (4.80)	95,757 (12.40)	1,86,463 (24.15)

Source: K. Suresh Singh, op.cit., and Bihar Government, Directorate of Economics & Statistics.

Figures in parenthesis indicate percentage of net area sown in the district.



#### 4.3 Other Capital Formation in Agriculture

Apart from the large scale growth of irrigation, Palamau's agriculture has also gained substantially in terms of other forms of capital formation in agriculture. Thus, as indicated by table 1.43 the total heads of live-stock in the district increased from 6.68 lakhs in 1920 to 12.8 lakh (excluding pigs) in 1972. The population of cattle alone, including bullocks as well as milch cows and their young stock, increased from about 4.4 lakhs to 8.1 lakhs over the same period.

Alongside the growth of livestock the stock of physical capital has also expanded considerably. In this case systematic data is not available over the years. Nevertheless the growth in physical capital in the district between selected years since 1945 is given below in table 1.44.

TABLE - 1.43GROWTH OF LIVESTOCK IN PALAMAU

('000)

Year	Total Livestock	Cattle	Buffaloes	Goats	Pigs
1920	668	442	90	105	-
1925	666	453	101	61	-
1930	592	409	90	54	-
1940	581	408	78	46	-
1945	492	352	69	33	-
1951	996	661	125	128	-
1956	1037	649	111	185	-
1961	1215	732	124	254	31
1972	1325	810	133	338	44

Source:- District Census hand book; 1961 & Annual Season & Crop Reports. The total for 1961 & 1972 are overstated by the addition of pigs for which data is missing in earlier years.

-: 23 :-

TABLE - 1.44

STOCK OF AGRICULTURAL MACHINERY & IMPLEMENTS IN PALAMAU 1945-1956

	Ploughs		Tractors	Carts	Oil Engines	Electric Pumps	Cane Crushers		Ghanis
	Wooden	Iron					Powered	Bullock Driver	
1945	59,347	19	4	2,544	-	-	-	479	
1956	1,18,634	268	8	3,265	79	2	44	995	1712
1961	1,46,415	879	13	3,778	43	16	22	1068	1541
1972	1,74,131		74	5,858	874	693	2165		1257

Source:- Livestock Census of Bihar, District Gazetteer 1961.  
Annual Seasonal Crop Reports.

Thus while the stock of traditional implements such as wooden ploughs increased from around fifty nine thousand in 1945 to nearly 1.74 lakhs in 1972, the stock of traditional farm machinery such as bullock driven ~~cane~~ crushers increased five fold ~~over~~ the quarter century and the number of carts increased by over 100%. At the same time modern farm machinery such as oil engines, electric pumps and powered cane crushers had made <sup>their</sup> appearance by 1956 along with the use of tractors and iron ploughs. The stock of all ~~these~~ non-traditional items has gone up phenomenally especially since the sixties.

#### 4.4 Yield Rate & Cropping Pattern

The relatively high rate of capital formation, in particular irrigation, during the post colonial period however is yet to reflect itself in increases of productivity. As indicated in table 1.45 sustained increases

TABLE - 1.45

#### AVERAGE YIELD RATES OF PRINCIPAL CROPS IN PALAMAU

(Maunds per acre)

Years	Winter Rice	Autum Rice	Wheat	Maize	Gram	Potato	Oilseed
1952-55	8.85	4.41	6.92	8.45	5.63	38.63	2.75
1957-60	7.27	4.45	5.70	8.13	3.61	46.37	2.84
1962-65	7.41	4.67	6.83	9.79	4.79	65.47	3.59
1967-70	5.63	3.79	6.08	8.58	3.78	112.57	3.35
1972-75	9.28	4.27	8.10	-	4.18	61.32	5.93

Source: Annual Season and Crop Reports.

in yield are noticable in crops like Potato & Oilseed but in most of the other crops the yield rates appear to be fluctuating around more or less constant levels. In terms of cropping pattern the share of crops like Potato & Oilseeds have more than doubled over the last fifty to sixty years but this still leaves their share at a mere 13% or so of gross cropped area (table-1.46). Cereal crops like rice, maize and wheat which provide the staple diet of the district and take up around 54% of the cropped area show no clear trends of rising productivity. Gram & pulses which also form an important item of food for low protein subsistence diets of the poor and take up another 33% or so of cropped area also do not show any rising productivity trends. Increases in production have therefore come mainly from increases in cropped area. And as we have seen earlier the growth of irrigation has made possible an increase in cropping intensity such that the gross cropped area has increased more than the net sown area.

#### 4.5 Agricultural Prices . . .

The time series of prices of some principal agricultural commodities between 1941 and 1972 has been reproduced below in table-1.47. Without going into the sharp year to year fluctuations which reflect the high variation in quantum and timing of rainfall, what we

TABLE - 1.46

CROPPING PATTERN IN SELECTED YEARS

PALAMAU

(% of gross cropped area)

Year	Rice	Wheat	Maize	Gram	Pulses	Sugar Cane	Oilseeds, Barley, Potato etc.	Total
1911-12	72.87	3.68	10.67	7.40		0.78	5.59	
1953-54	54.16	3.53	17.13	12.34	6.30	1.00	6.54	
1962-63	43.89	4.56	13.32	14.58	15.15	0.88	7.53	
1972-73	22.17	6.29	16.46	10.08	30.12	0.82	14.07	
1973-74	31.83	5.21	15.51	8.44	25.67	0.78	12.56	
1974-75	30.89	6.13	14.59	8.68	25.76	0.82	13.13	
1975-76	32.63	6.78	14.59	8.11	24.61	0.73	12.55	

Sources: Bihar Statistics, Agricultural Statistics of Bihar, Bihar Government. The data for 1911-12 is compiled from 'Palamau Statistics 1900-1901 to 1910-11, Bihar and Orissa Secretariat, Patna, 1913.

TABLE - 1.47

AGRICULTURAL PRICES IN PALAMAU

Year	(Rs. per maund)			
	Rice	Wheat	Maize	Gram
1941	4.31	-	-	3.75
1942	5.70	-	-	4.25
1943	7.37	-	-	7.75
1944	12.00	14.00	-	11.00
1945	10.50	12.00	-	8.00
1946	15.00	14.00	-	8.50
1947	18.00	24.00	-	20.00
1948	20.00	30.00	-	18.00
1949	19.00	27.00	-	15.00
1950	22.00	22.00	-	16.00
1953	21.20	20.00	-	22.00
1954	18.20	18.20	-	14.70
1955	13.30	-	-	8.40
1956	15.87	14.62	-	10.75
1957	18.00	-	10.56	15.00
1958	17.50	-	10.69	13.12
1959	18.00	-	8.44	20.20
1960	19.00	17.70	10.55	14.70
1961	12.10	16.75	10.66	16.49
1962	14.46	20.55	12.89	17.59
1963	13.85	20.14	10.59	20.74
1964	15.08	27.00	19.85	29.00
1965	27.66	34.32	53.62	32.17
1966	28.00	66.77	75.00	41.22
1967	37.00	33.70	74.19	44.40
1968	23.00	38.66	65.03	36.60
1969	23.60	39.60	46.75	38.00
1970	18.00	35.60	48.00	30.80
1971	21.63	39.20	62.13	34.40
1972	24.80	52.00	70.00	50.80

Source: Annual Season &amp; Crop Reports.



note over the long run is a peculiar 'ratchet effect' in prices. It will be noted that a long sustained price spurt started around 1943-44. This was evidently set in motion by the terrible Bengal Famine of 1943 and the 2nd world war. But the price spurt far outlived the famine as well as the war and prices did not stabilise until the early fifties. In the subsequent period prices did not come down except in individual years. On the whole they tended to fluctuate around the levels reached in the early fifties until there was another jump in agricultural price levels around 1964-65 to 1966-67 occasioned by massive crop failures. Once again prices did not go down to earlier levels but either increased or stabilised around the levels reached in 1966-67.

##### 5. LAND DISTRIBUTION

The distribution of land in 1972 is reproduced below in table-1.51. It will be noted that the distribution is highly skew. Thus at the top of the size groups we find holdings of over 30 acres which account for less than 2% of the number of holdings actually covering as much as 16.8% of the land held while the top 7.5% households control over 36% of the land. At the other end nearly 40% of the households share between



TABLE - 1.51

STATEMENT SHOWING DISTRIBUTION OF  
LAND HOLDINGS IN PALAMAU DISTRICT, 1972

Sl. No.	Holding Size	No. of holdings	Area in Acres
1.	Less than 1 acre	27,105 (15.34)	13,552 (1.26)
2.	1 acre to 2.5 acres	43,145 (24.41)	75,503 (7.03)
3.	2.5 acres to 5 acres	44,630 (25.25)	1,67,362 (15.59)
4.	5 acres to 10 acres	36,560 (20.69)	2,74,200 (25.54)
5.	10 acres to 15 acres	11,960 (6.77)	1,49,500 (13.93)
6.	15 acres to 30 acres	9,470 (5.36)	2,13,075 (19.85)
7.	30 acres to 50 acres	2,535 (1.43)	1,01,400 (9.45)
8.	50 acres and above	1,315 (0.74)	78,900 (7.35)
		1,76,720 (100)	10,73,492 (100)

Source: D.P.A.P. Project Report, Palamau, 1972, Figures in parenthesis denote share of Column totals.

them just over 8% of the total land while the smallest 15.34% of holdings cover between them just over 1% of the land.

Thus at its present state the cultivating population is already considerably differentiated. However since we do not have comparable data at earlier points of time it is not possible to judge whether the differentiation is static, increasing or decreasing. Some indicative evidence from two villages reproduced in tables 1.52 and 1.53, suggest that the differentiation has actually decreased following some 'levelling' in the 1950's land reform. And it is also evident in table 1.51 that about 45% of the holdings are in the middle category of 2.5 - 10 acres and they control over 41% of the land. In other words while the land distribution is already skewed the process of differentiation still appears to have reached only its initial stages.

## 6. INDUSTRY & INFRASTRUCTURE OTHER THAN IRRIGATION

### 6.1 Industry

We have seen already that industry, mining and quarrying employed altogether merely 3.1% of the districts population in 1971 as compared to 4.8% for Bihar and 8% in the country (table-1.33). And this includes not only large scale enterprises in urban areas but also

TABLE - 1.52

COMPARATIVE DISTRIBUTION OF OPERATIONAL HOLDING

Village Chatti

	Settlement of 1916-20		1977	
	Average holding size	% total land operated	Average holding size	% total land operated
< 2 acres	0.49	23.06	0.78	24.53
2 to > 6 acres	3.83	28.77	3.41	33.56
6 to > 10 acres	nil	nil	6.54	20.19
> 10 acres	16.02	48.17	25.79	21.72

Source: Village Settlement records and contemporary field data.

TABLE - 1.53

COMPARATIVE DISTRIBUTION OF OPERATIONAL HOLDING

Village Daho

	Settlement of 1916-20		1977	
	Average holding size	% total land operated	Average holding size	% total land operated
< 2 acres	0.94	1	1	4.03
2 > 6 acres	4.18	3.11	2.61	63.37
6 > 10 acres	7.25	4.63	6.40	16.17
> 10 acres	107.19	91.26	36.42	16.43

Source: Village Settlement Records and Contemporary field data.

small enterprises and even household enterprises in rural areas. Clearly the extent of industrialisation is not only marginal in absolute terms but also low in comparison to the country as a whole. Even if we add to the above sectors service activities like transport, communication, trade, profession and other services the share of this entire non-agricultural sector still remains only 13.2% of the total population as compared to nearly 28% for the country as a whole.

It would be useful nevertheless to look at the growth of specific branches of industry as indicators for the future, for the future industrial profile may have an important bearing even on the development of agriculture. The districtwise data available on industries is particularly weak for comparability over time. However we are reproducing below as an index of size the volume of employment in 1951 and 1960, in three branches of industry, of enterprises registered under the Factories Act.

TABLE - 1.61  
EMPLOYMENT IN SELECTED INDUSTRIES IN PALAMAU .

	Agro-Processing Mills (Rice, Flour, Oil etc.)	Lac & Shellac Manufacturing	Cement
1951	48	1362	1134
1960	139	836	1287

Source: Bihar Statistical Handbooks.

For whatever it is worth we can see from the above table that there seems to be a decline in the forest produce industries like lac & shellac which reflects both the decline in the forest area itself as well as the shift of processing centres to locations outside the district. On the other hand there has been a growth of over 13% in employment in the cement industry - one of the oldest and most important industrial activities of the district - which reflects the growth of purely non-agro based industries in the area. However what is most interesting is the much faster expansion of agro-processing activities. Thus though the total employment in these activities is still negligible it is to be noted that agro-processing mills for rice, flour, edible oil etc. expanded over the decade 1951-60 to nearly three times their original size in 1951. This reflects the increasing commercialisation of agriculture and increasing production for the market even of so called non-commercial crops like rice, wheat etc.

#### 6.2 Other Infrastructure

By the end of the census year 1971 only 407 out of the 3194 inhabited villages had any electric connection at all. Five blocks had no electrification at all



while in another eight blocks the ratio of non-electrified villages to electrified villages was 5:1.

In terms of communication facilities the total length of black-topped P.W.D. road mileage by the end of 1971 was only 340 miles to serve an area of nearly 4921 sq. miles. The total road mileage (including kutcha roads) per sq. mile was only 0.6, while the mileage of macadamised all weather roads per sq. mile was even lower at 0.4, such that in the raining season as many as 60% of the villages become inaccessible and cut off for nearly 6 months from their markets.

In addition to the road mileage there is at present nearly 150 miles of railway lines laid in the district. The railway line passes into Palamau from Gaya district in the North and leads into Ranchi district in the South. A scheme to extend the line westwards at Barwadih junction to connect with Cherimeri coal field in Madhya Pradesh has now been given up midway through the scheme. It is important to revive the scheme not only because it would effectively open up the Palamau and Sirguja hinterlands-rich in mineral and forest wealth but because it could also cut down the main Calcutta - Bombay rail link by nearly 200 miles.

## 7. THE SELECTED VILLAGES

The considerations underlying the choice of the four villages have already been explained earlier in the Introduction. Nevertheless it useful, as a background to what follows, to present some data here about the character of each village.

### 7.1 Chatti

Chatti is a village located about a mile off the main Daltongunge - Ranchi road, at a point about thirty minutes out of Daltongunge by bus or car, where the road crosses the Mylah Nadi a tributary of the Amanat.

A small village covering some seventy five acres as a revenue mouza, it has a little over sixty acres under cultivation. Of this some eighteen acres are irrigated through wells and tanks, there being no scheme yet to lift the waters of the Mylah nadi. Being located in a broad fertile valley between two of Palamau's numerous hill ranges, the village is able to produce paddy. The other main crops are wheat, maize, oilseeds, and pulses.

The village had a total population of about three hundred and fifty persons in the 1971 census distributed in about ninety households. It is interesting to note that there was a total population of 296



persons in 1951. The 1961 census showed a population of 362 persons divided in 68 households. Thus in 1971 though the number of households had gone up the total population had actually come down, thus indicating that there is a process of rapid partitioning and migration. The reduction in population is also reflected in the decline of total workers from 101 in 1961 to 90 in 1971. Apart from this the census comparisons show a change in the occupational distribution of workers. However these changes are mainly attributable to a shift from the income criterion to the time criterion of classification in the 1971 census. In reality the village consists mainly of cultivators of various sizes, a few artisans and professionals like school teachers and agricultural labourers including a small number of landless labourers.

The village is served by a primary school but there are no health facilities. What was once a pucca road connecting it to the Daltongunge - Ranchi road has now fallen into disrepair and an electricity connection which was given a few years ago is no longer operative. Drinking water is procured from about a dozen wells.

TABLE - 1.71

LAND USE IN SELECTED VILLAGES

	(acres)				
	Total area	Cropped area	Irrigated area	Forest area	Others
CHATTI	75.03	62.97 (83.93)	18.48 (24.63)	-	12.06 (16.07)
DAHO	941.99	681.23 (72.32)	15.65 (1.67)	200.00 (21.23)	60.76 ( 6.45)
JORI	951.65	370.51 (38.93)	0.17 (0.02)	477.87 (50.21)	103.27 (10.85)
SHRIPALPUR	265.22	157.16 (59.26)	10.69 (4.03)	49.91 (18.82)	58.15 (21.93)

Figures in parenthesis give % of total area

## 7.2 Daho

Normally when the river Koel is shallow enough to be crossed by jeeps or heavy vehicles Daho can be reached within a couple of hours along a direct kaccha road from Daltongunge. But at other times the journey may take the best of a day going via Garwa & the block headquarters at Ranka. Even from Ranka to Daho a large part of the direct cross country route is not negotiable during the rains and Daho can only be approached by a detour through Bhandaria block. Compared to Chatti it is a very large revenue mouza of nine hundred and forty two acres. But being an upland forest area, 200 acres are covered in forest, about sixty acres is uncultivable and of the cropped area of 681 acre a mere 15 acres or so - less than in Chatti - is irrigated. The main crops are coarse grains and maize though some highland paddy, oilseeds and pulses are also grown.

The total population which stood at about 201 persons in 1951 went up to 217 in 1961 and 277 in 1971, the number of households having gone up from 48 to 60 over the same period. In other words even in 1971 there was more than three acres of village land, or over two acres of cropped area, per head of population. The occupational distribution shows a sharp change between 1961-1971 but this is once again mainly a result of

TABLE - 1.72  
POPULATION & OCCUPATIONAL DISTRIBUTION IN SELECTED VILLAGES

Year	No. of house- holds	Total Popula- tion	Cultiva- tors	Agricul- tural Labourers	Mining & Manufac- turing	Household industry	Trade, Trans- port and Services
CHATTI	1961	68	362	25 (24.75)	70 (69.31)	3 (2.97)	3 (2.97)
	1971	47	350	45 (50.00)	43 (47.78)	-	2 (2.22)
DAHO	1961	51	217	71 (52.99)	62 (46.27)	-	1 (0.75)
	1971	60	277	34 (45.33)	41 (54.67)	-	-
JORI	1961	44	227	121 (84.03)	14 (9.72)	7 (4.86)	2 (1.39)
	1971	47	304	68 (75.56)	17 (18.89)	5 (5.55)	-
SHRIPALPUR	1961	10	48	23 (82.14)	4 (14.29)	-	1 (3.57)
	1971	6	83	13 (52.00)	10 (40.00)	-	2 (8.00)

Figures in paranthesis give % of total workers in the village.

the change from income to time criterion in census classification. The large bulk of Daho's population is made up of small or poor peasant cultivators of tribal or harijan origin. The few big land owners are really merchants and money lenders of the Sau caste, mainly resident in a neighbouring village, who have acquired interests in land only in recent generations.

The kachha road connecting Daho to Ranka on one side and Chainpur on the other side is the only means of communication. The village has no electricity or health care facilities, while a small patshala is all that there is in the village for education. Drinking water is provided from a set of five wells and five tubewells.

### 7.3 Jori

Jori is a village located in Mahuadhar block in the south western corner of Palamau district. It is in fact at one edge of the beautiful bowl shaped Chechhari valley, set against a hill bordering Sirguja district of Madhya Pradesh. It is reached from Daltongunge in a days journey by bus or car through dense forests and ghats via the one pass in the northern rim of the valley which provides the only means of entering it.

TABLE - 1.73

FACILITIES IN SELECTED VILLAGES

	Chatti	Daho	Jori	Shripalpur
Education	1 Primary School	-	1 Primary School (1971)	-
Health	-	-	-	-
Drinking Water	12 Wells	5 Wells 5 Tubewells	3 Wells	1 Well
Communication	Pacca Road	Kachha Road	Kachha Road	



Like Daho, Jori is a large revenue mouza of 951 acres. But of this as much as 477 acres is forest land and another 104 acres is uncultivated, leaving a total cropped area of only 370 acres. Irrigation is non-existent. The main crops are paddy, maize, and coarse grains. Some wheat, pulses and oilseeds are also grown.

The population of Jori increased from 156 persons in 1951 to 304 persons in 1971 i.e. an increase of nearly 5% per annum on the average. Most of the population is tribal, belonging to the Oraon or Munda tribes, and engaged in cultivation as peasants of varying size groups or agricultural labour. A few households are engaged in handicrafts and services. The changes in occupational pattern between 1961 and 1971 are spurious as we have noted earlier. But what is interesting is the decline in the total number of workers from 144 in 1961 to only 90 in 1971 inspite of a net growth in population. This indicates a high rate of migration of the working population. A primary school has been opened in Jori in recent years but there are as yet no health facilities. Electricity has yet to be extended to the block and the only access to Jori is by a kachha road connecting it to the block headquarters about five kilometers away.



The entire village depends on three wells for its supply of potable water.

#### 7.4 Shripalpur

Located about ten kilometers off the main Daltongunge - Aurangabad road which links Palamau to the Grand Trunk Road at Aurangabad, the village can be reached in about three hours by bus or jeep from either Daltongunge or Aurangabad. But there is no approach road to the village and the last two kilometers or so has to be traversed across fields.

Though as a revenue mouza it has about 265 acres, i.e. more than three times the size of Chatti, the village had a population of only 83 persons in 1971. The 1971 census records only six households in the entire village, though at the time of our survey we found there are in fact 12 households in the village. But these were all Chamar households implying that Shripalpur is really only a harijan tola which forms part of a larger cluster of villages. Indeed most of the holdings in the revenue mouza belong to persons residing in neighbouring villages who are also frequently the maliks who employ the harijan agricultural labour families of Shripalpur.

Of the 265 acres in the village about 50 acres is forest land and another 58 acres is uncultivated,

leaving 157.16 acres of cropped area. Of this a little over 10 acres is irrigated. Almost the entire resident population of Shripalpur is made up of agriculture labourers and there are two persons engaged in services.

In terms of basic facilities the village neither has a school nor health care facility. It has no electricity or even an approach road. And the only source of drinking water is a single well.



CHAPTER - II

ANALYSIS OF HOUSEHOLDS - I

THE DISTRIBUTION OF ASSETS

Bondage, as we shall see subsequently, is a specific aspect of the structure of agrarian relations as they exist in Palamau today. Consequently an analysis of the phenomenon of bondage must begin with an analysis of this larger structure.

For this purpose it is useful to start with an identification of three basic segments of the rural population. Maliks, or employers who basically derive their livelihood from the employment and exploitation of labour, mazdoors who basically derive their livelihood from selling their labour and kisans who basically derive their livelihood from self cultivation based on family labour, i.e. by and large they neither depend on employment of outside labour nor selling their own labour outside the family farm. Of course these are not 'pure' categories in the sense that kisan households may from time to time hire in or hire out labour and both mazdoors and maliks may derive a part of their livelihood from self cultivation of their own holdings. Maliks have also been known in some parts of the country to hire out labour! The classification of households here is thus based on the principal means of livelihood.

Secondly there may be wide variations in the ownership of land and other assets not only between the different categories of households but even within the same category, differentiation, which would not only explain why a particular household is malik, mazdoor or kisan today but also allow us to predict the likely patterns of upward or downward mobility in future. Differentiation, or the lack of it, also provides the basis for understanding the total structure of agrarian relations. Consequently, apart from the classification of households into malik, mazdoor and kisan households it is also necessary to further classify them according to ownership of assets, the principal asset in this case being land.

#### 1. Land

Different aspects of land distribution between agrarian classes and within individual classes in the four villages surveyed in the district are reproduced below in tables-2.11 to 2.14.

In Chatti maliks constituting only 31.39% of the total number of households control as much as 76.68% of land owned, their share of operated land being marginally less at 74.50%. The class as a whole is thus a net leaser out of land, but the extent of leasing is quite small as reflected in the marginal difference

between the share of the class in owned land and operated land. Interestingly the share of the class in irrigated land, i.e. the best rice lands in the village, is even higher at nearly ninety per cent.

In contrast the share of kisans, constituting 26.75% of total households, is only 9.88% of owned land and that of mazdoors 13.44% while they constitute as much as 41.86% of the total number of households. In both cases the shares of operated land are slightly larger, these classes being net leasers in of land. Their shares of total irrigated land are even less than that of owned or operated land at 9.26% and 1.35% respectively.

Thus on the whole the extent of land leasing is quite limited such that the distribution of owned and operated land are very similar. In terms of either we find that there is already a high degree of concentration of land in the hands of the maliks at the cost of the kisans and mazdoors. However the degree of concentration is much greater in the case of the best quality irrigated land of which nearly ninety per cent belongs to the malik class who constitute just over thirty per cent of all households in the village.



TABLE - 2.11PRESENT LAND DISTRIBUTIONVillage Chatti

	Size class ownership holdings	Percen- tage of house- holds	Aver- age family size	Aver- age hold- ing size	% land owned	% land opera- ted	% land irriga- ted
	10 acres & above	2.33	3.75	25.79	25.77	21.72	56.77
	6 to < 10	6.98	5.91	6.54	19.62	20.18	22.31
	2 to < 6	18.60	6.50	3.64	29.25	30.19	10.30
	Less than 2	3.48	4.16	1.35	2.02	2.41	nil
Maliks		31.39	6.09	5.68	76.68	74.50	89.38
	10 acres & above	00.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
	6 to < 10	00.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
	2 to < 6	2.32	4.00	2.05	2.05	2.16	5.18
	Less than 2	24.41	4.33	0.74	7.82	9.10	4.08
Kisans		26.75	4.30	0.85	9.88	11.26	9.26
	10 acres & above	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
	6 to < 10	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
	2 to < 6	1.16	5.50	2.31	1.16	1.21	0.00
	0 to < 2	34.88	3.65	0.65	12.29	13.01	1.35
	Land Less	5.81	2.40	nil	nil	nil	nil
Mazdoors		41.86	3.86	0.75	13.44	14.22	1.35



As expected there is also a sharp difference in the average size of holdings which is as much as 5.68% acres in case of maliks as compared to only 0.85 acres and 0.75 acres in the case of kisans and mazdoors respectively. What is surprising however is that there is also a similar sharp difference in family size. Compared to over six persons per family of maliks there are only 4.3 persons per family of kisans and 3.86 persons per family of mazdoors. This would be partly accounted for by a conscious decision among the poorer classes to have small families and partly by the higher mortality rate among them.

Within the class of maliks we find the heaviest concentration of households in the category of 2 to 6 acre holdings with average size of 3.64 acres (18.6% of all households). However while they own about thirty per cent of owned or operated land, their share of irrigated land is only 10.3%. In comparison the top 2.32% of households in the above ten acres group, who have an average holding size of over 25 acres,<sup>1</sup> control over 25% of owned land and as much 56.77% of total irrigated land in the village. The extent of differentiation even among the maliks and the high degree of

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1. In fact there are only two such households in this village including the former landlord. See Sudipto Mundle - Report from a Bihar Village, Mainstream, Vol.XVI, No.28, March 11, 1978.

monopoly over land - especially the best irrigated land - is obvious.

Among kisans almost the entire group of households are small holders in the less than two acres category with an average holding size of less than one acre. A couple of households own a little over 2 acres and there is nobody owning 6 acres or more.

Finally at the other extreme we have mazdoors with the large bulk once again concentrated in the less than 2 acres category, one family owning 2.31 acres and the remainder (less than 6% of all households) being totally landless. It is important to note that the actual numbers of totally landless families is very small, the larger bulk of mazdoors owning tiny parcels of land.

In village Daho the patterns is somewhat different compared to Chatti. There is just one malik family owning over thirty six acres which amounts to 15.61% of the cultivated area in the village, and controlling altogether 16.43% of the cultivated area - a small fraction of this being leased in. The entire five acres of irrigated land in the village falls within this chunk of land.

At the other end of the scale you have mazdoors constituting nearly 90% of the households in the village

but also controlling 73.85% and 70.25% of owned and operated land respectively. In between you have kisans accounting for about 8% of all households as well as land owned. Their share of land operated is a little over eleven per cent. Thus compared to Chatti the concentration of land in Daho is much less, such that the average holdings of kisans and mazdoors are also much larger at 3.51 acres and 2.50 acres respectively. However as in the case of Chatti the average family size of kisan and mazdoor households are again quite small at 2.64 head and 3.42 heads per family respectively as compared to over eleven persons in the malik's family.

It is interesting to note that the kisan and mazdoor households are both mainly clustered in the 2 to 6 acre group in Daho as compared to the less than 2 acres group in Chatti and there are even some kisans and mazdoors in the 6 to 10 acres category. The number of purely land less labour household is once again very small at hardly ten per cent of the total population.

However this difference in the landbase of kisans and mazdoors in Daho as compared to Chatti is exaggerated in the physical statistics because Daho is an upland village with the general quality of land much poorer here than in Chatti which is in a valley.

TABLE - 2.12  
PRESENT LAND DISTRIBUTION

<u>Village Daho</u>							
	Size Class ownership holdings	Percen- tage of house- holds	Aver- age family size	Aver- age hold- ing size	% land owner- ship	% land opera- ted	% land irri- gated
	10 acres & above	1.30	11.5	36.42	15.61	16.43	100%
LIK	6 to < 10	nil	nil	nil	nil	nil	nil
	2 to < 6	nil	nil	nil	nil	nil	nil
	Less than 2	nil	nil	nil	nil	nil	nil
1 Maliks		1.30	11.5	36.42	15.61	16.43	100%
	10 acres & above	nil	nil	nil	nil	nil	nil
SAN	6 to < 10	1.30	2	6.04	2.59	2.25	nil
	2 to < 6	7.79	2.75	3.09	7.95	11.07	nil
	Less than 2	nil	nil	nil	nil	nil	nil
1 Kisans		9.09	2.64	3.51	10.54	13.32	nil
	10 acres & above	nil	nil	nil	nil	nil	nil
	6 to < 10	7.79	5.17	6.46	16.62	13.92	nil
ZDOOR	2 to < 6	63.64	3.33	2.56	53.80	52.30	nil
	Less than 2	10.39	3.19	1.00	3.43	4.03	nil
	Landless	7.79	2.75	-	-	-	nil
Mazdoors		89.61	3.42	2.50	73.85	70.25	nil

Consequently in terms of economic value the asset base of the poor in Daho is not really much better than that of the poor in Chatti.

In village Jori in the extreme south of the district though the households are differentiated between different classes the actual concentration of land is even less than in Daho. Thus maliks constituting nearly thirty per cent of total population control about forty five per cent of owned land or operated land, the difference being negligible, and a little over forty six per cent of irrigated land. Kisans constituting 27.45% of households also control 27.59% of own land and 32.81% of operated land - the difference being leased in from mazdoors rather than the maliks. Their share of irrigated land is nearly twenty three per cent. Finally we have mazdoors, constituting 43.13% of total households, controlling about 28.29% of owned land and 21.86% of operated land - the difference being leased out mainly to kisans. Their share of irrigated land is over thirty per cent.

/ the Thus the distribution of land is much more proportionate to/distribution of households in Jori than in Chatti or Daho. It is mildly skewed in favour of the malik class, their excess share corresponding to a deficit share of the mazdoor class, while the owner-



ship of land by kisans is proportionate to their share of households. There is also some leasing out by the mazdoor class, but this again is leased out not to maliks but to the kisans. Following from this relatively low concentration of land, the average holding size of both kisan and mazdoor holdings are much larger compared to either Chatti or even Daho at 6.83 acres and 4.45 acres for kisans and mazdoors respectively. But as in the other two villages, there is a difference in average family size between classes, the kisan and mazdoor households being relatively smaller than malik households such that in per capita terms the extent of land concentration is even lower than in the land distribution by households.

Finally we have village Shripalpur which, though it is a proper revenue mouza or listed village in the census, is really a Harijan (Chamar) tola forming part of a larger cluster of villages. As such the village is a very small one with no maliks at all since the latter, as we shall see below, generally belong to the Brahmin and Rajput communities in this area.

It is really a village of impoverished peasants about seventeen per cent of whom are kisans controlling about fifteen per cent of the land in holdings of about 2.22 acres each on the average. The remaining 83% or

TABLE - 2.13  
PRESENT LAND DISTRIBUTION

		<u>Village Jori</u>					
	Size Class ownership holdings	Percen- tage of house- holds	Aver- age family size	Aver- age hold- ing size	% land owner- ship	% land opera- ted	% land irriga- ted
MALIK	10 acres & above	11.76	3.5	15.02	26.02	29.23	16.38
	6 to < 10	15.69	5.44	7.47	17.26	14.75	28.67
	2 to < 6	1.96	3	2.92	0.84	1.35	1.82
	Less than 2	nil	nil	nil	nil	nil	nil
All Maliks		29.41	4.73	10.19	44.12	45.33	46.87
KISAN	10 acres & above	1.96	3.5	11.67	3.37	3.23	7.28
	6 to < 10	17.65	4	8.02	20.84	24.06	8.20
	2 to < 6	7.84	3.75	2.93	3.38	5.52	7.28
	Less than 2	nil	nil	nil	nil	nil	nil
All Kisans		27.45	3.39	6.83	27.59	32.81	22.76
MAZDOOR	10 acres & above	5.88	6	12.37	10.72	5.33	8.19
	6 to < 10	5.88	3.67	6.93	6.00	5.59	9.11
	2 to < 6	17.65	3.86	3.70	9.62	8.53	7.61
	Less than 2	7.84	3.5	1.69	1.95	2.41	5.46
	Landless	5.88	4	-	-	-	-
All Mazdoors		43.13	3.86	4.45	28.29	21.86	30.37



so are all mazdoor households controlling about 80% of the land in holdings of 2.11 acres each on the average. Almost the entire land is unirrigated, save for a couple of acres, even though Shripalpur lies in the relatively prosperous block of Hariharganj in the fertile plane land to the north of the district.<sup>2</sup> Shripalpur is thus just a small tola with almost no differentiation within the village.

Indeed the difference between the kisans and mazdoors here is not in their land base at all but only in the fact that the latter sell labour and are subordinated to their employers or maliks in the neighbouring villages. However it is interesting to note that as in the other three villages landless labour is once again scarce, in fact non-existent, in Shripalpur. Most of the mazdoors are concentrated in the size group owning two to six acres.

Between the contrasts of Chatti at one extreme and Jori or Shripalpur at the other we can now draw a few general insights on the structure of land relations in Palamau.

First of all it is noted that the incidence of tenancy or the leasing of land for cultivation is very low in the district. This shows up in the uniformly

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2. See the village notes at end of Chapter-I above.

TABLE - 2.14

PRESENT LAND DISTRIBUTIONVILLAGE SHRIPALPUR

Size class ownership holdings	Percentage of house-holds	Average family size	Average holding size	% land owner-ship	% land operated	% land irrigated
10 acres & above						
MALIK						
6 to < 10						
2 to < 6						
Less than 2						
All Malikis	nil	nil	nil	nil	nil	nil
10 acres & above						
KISAN						
6 to < 10						
2 to < 6	16.67	3.5	2.22	14.54	15.66	nil
Less than 2	-	-	-	-	-	-
All Kisans	16.67	3.5	2.22	14.54	15.66	nil
10 acres & above						
MAZDOOR						
6 to < 10	8.33	13.5	6.29	20.59	20.16	80
2 to < 6	58.33	6.71	2.78	63.83	61.16	-
Less than 2	16.67	5	0.45	1.04	3.02	20
Landless	-	-	-	-	-	-
All Mazdoors	83.33	7.05	2.11	85.55	84.34	100

close correspondence between the distribution of ownership and operational holdings in all four villages covering different regions of the district. Such evidence is also supported independently by another survey in the district<sup>3</sup> which showed that a bare 11.5% of households lease out land while only 9.2% of households lease in land. In terms of area cultivated the survey showed that the land leased in amounted to hardly 4.6%, and the land leased out a mere 2.5%, of total cultivated area in the district.

Secondly it is noted that the concentration of land is not uniformly advanced in all areas. Chatti already has an extremely high concentration of land whereas in Daho, and even more so in Jori, the distribution of land between classes is much more proportionate to the distribution of households between these classes. And in Shripalpur there is in fact no concentration at all. Moreover we have already seen in the preceding chapter that land concentration has not increased monotonically over time. Thus for the two villages for which we have the comparative data (tables 1.51 & 1.52) we see that between the time of land settlement (1920) and the present (1977) there has

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3. See S.R. Bose & P.P. Ghosh - Agro Economic Survey of Bihar, B.K. Enterprises, Patna, 1976, tables A-7 & A-8.

actually been a substantial increase in the proportion of lands held by the middle sized holdings and a corresponding decline in the share of the largest holdings.<sup>4</sup> At any rate the important point to be stressed here is that in those villages where the concentration of land is less, the average holding size or land base of kisan and even mazdoor families is larger.

Thirdly since in all villages the average family size is smaller in kisan households than in malik households and smallest among mazdoors, the differences in per capita holding size between classes are even less than the differences in average holding size per household.

Finally, and perhaps most importantly from our point of view, it is noted that because of the limited differentiation or expropriation of small peasants, the

- 
4. Of course it is important to stress that this leveling was not a consequence of factors internal to the peasantry i.e. the 'substantive changes' which Shanin and others have highlighted as natural factors which contain or reverse the process of differentiation (see T. Shanin - *The Awkward Class*, Oxford, 1972. See also his Socio-Economic Mobility & The Rural History of Russia 1905-30 (mimeo) undated).

Rather it occurred partly as a direct outcome of the land reform and partly an indirect outcome in the partial transfers of land, under threat of the reform, to merchants and money-lenders who bought out the land in small pieces.

size of the landless labour class proper is very small, even in absolute numbers and even in Chatti where land concentration is most advanced. Consequently we may say that generally speaking the major component of labour used by the maliks, apart from their own supervisory labour, comes from labourers who also own plots of land of their own.

## 2. Assets other than land

The distribution of assets other than land in the four villages have been reproduced below in tables 2.21 to 2.24 and compared to the distribution of land. For this purpose the distribution of land, bullocks, ploughs and goats and pigs has been taken in terms of quantities while that of other farm implements etc. have been taken in value terms since they cannot be added up in a common quantity unit.

Once again we find interesting comparisons between the different villages. Thus in Chatti the maliks who control nearly seventy seven per cent of owned land own around fifty three per cent of both bullocks and ploughs, about forty eight per cent of other implements and less than fifteen per cent of goats and pigs in the village. At the other extreme mazdoors who own around thirteen per cent of the land also own around sixteen



per cent of bullocks and ploughs, nearly twenty two per cent of other implements and as much as forty seven per cent of goats and pigs. In between we have the kisans owning hardly two per cent of land but as much as thirty one per cent of bullocks, ploughs as well as other implements in the village and over thirty eight per cent of goats and pigs.

In Daho maliks own between eleven to fifteen per cent of other implement, ploughs and bullocks as compared to about sixteen per cent of land. Kisans own between sixteen to twenty per cent of bullocks, ploughs and other implements as compared to around eleven per cent of land. Mazdoors own between sixty five to seventy one per cent of these assets compared to around seventy four per cent of land. Goats and pigs are distributed between the three classes in the ratio of 22.5%, 7.5% and 70% respectively.

In Jori maliks own about sixty one per cent of bullocks and ploughs and about forty six per cent of other implements as compared to forty four per cent of land. Kisans own between thirteen to seventeen per cent of these assets as against nearly twenty eight per cent of land. Mazdoors own twenty four per cent of bullocks, twenty six per cent of ploughs and over thirty seven per cent of other implements as against

TABLE - 2.21  
DISTRIBUTION OF ASSETS OTHER THAN LAND

VILLAGE CHATTI

		% of village totals				
Ownership holdings	Average holding size	Land owned %	Bullocks %	Ploughs %	Goats and Pigs %	Value of other implements
<hr/>						
10 acres & above	25.79	25.77	19.04	18.75	nil	16.52
6 to < 10	6.54	19.62	15.87	15.62	4.25	8.71
2 to < 6	3.64	29.25	14.28	15.62	10.63	16.30
Less than 2	1.35	2.02	3.17	3.12	nil	5.36
<hr/>						
All Maliks	5.68	76.68	52.36	53.11	14.88	46.89
<hr/>						
10 acres & above	nil	nil	nil	nil	nil	nil
6 to < 10	nil	nil	nil	nil	nil	nil
2 to < 6	2.05	2.05	4.76	3.12	6.38	4.64
Less than 2	0.74	7.82	26.98	28.12	31.91	26.67
<hr/>						
All Kisans	0.85	9.88	31.74	31.24	38.29	31.31
<hr/>						
10 acres & above	nil	nil	nil	nil	nil	nil
6 to < 10	nil	nil	nil	nil	nil	nil
2 to < 6	2.31	1.16	nil	nil	nil	nil
Less than 2	0.65	12.29	15.87	15.62	46.80	21.80
<hr/>						
All Mazdoors	0.75	13.44	15.87	15.62	46.80	21.80



twenty eight per cent of land. Goats and pigs are distributed between the three classes in the ratio of 44.94%, 29.21% and 25.85% respectively.

Finally in Shripalpur, there being no maliks in the village, mazdoors own about eighty per cent of bullocks, seventy eight per cent of ploughs, eighty eight per cent of other implements and about eighty nine per cent of goats and pigs as against eighty six per cent of land. The remainder belongs to the kisans.

From the above description of asset distribution two interesting patterns emerge. First of all it is noted that generally the share of total bullocks in a village belonging to a particular class is very similar to the share of total ploughs in the village belonging to the same class - and also to some extent the share of other implements. This is not surprising for bullocks & ploughs form parts of an integrated ploughing unit and generally we may expect their distribution to go together. This is also true, but only partly, in the case of other implements where, for instance, the share of maliks may be relatively less and that of mazdoors relatively more compared to their shares of bullocks and ploughs. This is because the mazdoor owns the implements he uses but not the bullocks and ploughs while working on the maliks land.

TABLE - 2.22  
DISTRIBUTION OF ASSETS OTHER THAN LAND

VILLAGE DAHO

VILLAGE DATA							% of village totals
	Ownership holdings	Average holding size	Land owned %	Bullocks %	Ploughs %	Goats and Pigs %	Value of other implements
MALIKS	10 acres & above	36.42	15.61	15.38	13.33	22.5	11.70
	6 to < 10						
	2 to < 6						
	Less than 2						
All Malikis		36.42	15.61	15.38	13.33	22.5	11.70
KISANS	10 acres & above						
	6 to < 10	6.04	2.59	3.85	3.33	-	1.17
	2 to < 6	3.09	7.95	15.38	13.33	7.5	16.38
	Less than 2	-	-	-	-	-	-
All Kisans		3.51	10.54	19.24	16.66	7.5	17.55
MAZDOORS	10 acres & above						
	6 to < 10	6.46	16.62	3.85	10.00		2.89
	2 to < 6	2.56	53.80	57.68	56.68	67.50	57.10
	Less than 2	1.00	3.43	3.85	3.33	2.50	10.76
Landless		-	-	-	-	-	-
All Mazdoors		2.50	73.85	65.38	70.01	70.00	70.75

TABLE - 2.23  
DISTRIBUTION OF ASSETS OTHER THAN LAND

VILLAGE JORI

VILLAGE JOURI						
		% of village total				
Ownership holdings	Average holding size	Land owned %	Bullocks %	Ploughs %	Goats and Pigs %	Value of other implements
<hr/>						
10 acres & above	15.02	26.02	19.51	19.57	12.36	15.63
MALIKS	6 to < 10	7.47	17.26	39.02	39.13	32.58
	2 to < 6	2.92	0.84	2.44	2.17	-
	Less than 2	nil	nil	nil	nil	1.39
						nil
<hr/>						
All Maliks		10.19	44.12	60.97	60.87	44.94
						45.51
<hr/>						
10 acres & above	11.67	3.37	2.44	2.17	5.62	1.68
KISANS	6 to < 10	8.02	20.84	6.10	4.35	11.23
	2 to < 6	2.93	3.38	6.10	6.52	12.36
	Less than 2	nil	nil	nil	nil	3.91
						nil
<hr/>						
All Kisans		6.83	27.59	14.64	13.04	29.21
						16.76
<hr/>						
10 acres & above	12.37	10.72	6.10	6.52	5.62	8.71
MAZDOORS	6 to < 10	6.93	6.00	6.10	8.70	7.86
	2 to < 6	3.70	9.62	7.32	6.52	6.75
	Less than 2	1.69	1.95	4.88	4.35	5.62
						11.53
<hr/>						
All Mazdoors		4.45	28.29	24.39	26.09	25.85
						37.51

What is intriguing however are the variations between class shares of land owned on the one hand and bullocks and ploughs on the other. This may happen either when there is substantial leasing of land or substantial hiring of bullocks (& ploughs) or both. In the present case we have seen already that the reported extent of land leasing is marginal. Partly, therefore, the differences in shares must be attributed to the hiring of bullocks. But the extent of bullock hiring is also fairly limited. Consequently we must conclude that the extent of land leasing and tenancy is under reported in the survey. This kind of non sampling error, particularly on the question of tenancy in India, is well known. What is interesting here is that data for distribution of bullocks and ploughs, after adjustment for hiring, can be compared with the land ownership distribution to give us an alternative indirect check on the data from direct responses on land leasing. We have not attempted this quantitative exercise here but we may conclude qualitatively that though it is low the extent of tenancy is obviously not as low as reported.

The second important pattern is the wide variation between villages in the shares of different classes in the ownership of assets. Thus in Shripalpur, which is admittedly an unusual case, the mazdoor class itself

-: 68 :-

TABLE - 2.24  
DISTRIBUTION OF ASSETS OTHER THAN LAND  
VILLAGE SHRIPALPUR

VILLAGE SHRIPALPUR							% of village total
Ownership holdings	Average holding size	Land owned %	Bullocks %	Ploughs %	Goats and Pigs %	Value of other implements	
MALIKS							
10 acres & above							
6 to < 10							
2 to < 6							
Less than 2							
All Malikis	nil	nil	nil	nil	nil	nil	
KISANS							
10 acres & above							
6 to < 10							
2 to < 6	2.22	14.54	20.00	22.22	11.11	12.53	
Less than 2	-	-	-	-	-	-	
All Kisans	2.22	14.54	20.00	22.22	11.11	12.53	
MAZDOORS							
10 acres & above							
6 to < 10	6.29	20.59	6.67	11.11	11.11	13.93	
2 to < 6	2.78	63.83	73.33	66.67	33.33	68.25	
Less than 2	0.45	1.04	-	-	44.44	5.29	
All Mazdoors	2.11	85.55	80.00	77.78	88.88	87.47	



still controls approximately eighty per cent or more of different assets and in Daho around seventy per cent. On the other hand in Chatti and Jori the maliks already control a dominant share of the assets. Among them we know that in Jori this is only partly a matter of concentration since maliks in any case constitute around thirty per cent of the households. In Chatti the maliks dominant control over assets, especially land, does reflect the high degree of concentration of assets. But even here it must be remembered that differentiation has not proceeded far enough to throw up a large body of purely landless labourers, such that the bulk of labour available for the maliks is labour provided by mazdoors who still own small plots of land and other assets. And this is true a fortiori for Daho, Jori & Shripalpur.

### 3. Asset Distribution, Caste & Class

It is interesting from the view point of grasping the social realities of almost any Indian village to examine the possible association of castes with classes or even merely the distribution of assets e.g. land. For this purpose we have reproduced below in tables 2.31 to 2.34 the caste distribution of households in different classes and size groups of holdings in the four villages.

Two interesting patterns emerge. In Chatti where, as we have seen, the differentiation is most marked the caste - class association is also the clearest. Among the class of maliks who constitute 31.39% of all households we find that Brahmins alone make up about 28%. The remaining three per cent or so are made up of stray cases or Kaisths, Kumhars & Bhuiyas. At the other end out of the 41.86% mazdoor households as much as 39.55% is made up of Bhuiyas, the rest being stray cases of Lohars or Kahars. And finally it is these artisan castes of Lohars and Kahars, along with Kumhars & Parahis, who make up the entire 26.75% Kisan households in the middle. Similarly in Daho the small percentage of maliks come from the money lending caste of Saus, whereas the entire mazdoor class comes from the caste of Bhuiyas or scheduled tribes like the Korwas and Parhaias.

On the other hand in Jori where, as we have again noted earlier, the extent of differentiation is much less, no clear class-caste association is evident at all. Members of the Munda and Oraon tribes, who make up the large bulk of population, are fairly evenly dispersed between maliks, kisans and mazdoors. Other stray households belonging to tribes of the Nagesias and Kisans (not to be confused with the class) or castes like the



-: 71 :-

TABLE - 2.31

CASTE-CLASS ASSOCIATION  
VILLAGE CHATTI

	Size Class ownership holdings	% distribution					
		Brahmins	Kaisthas	Bhuiyas	Barahis	Lohars	Kumhars Kahars
MALIK (31.39)	10 acres & above	1.16	1.16				
	6 to < 10	6.98					
	2 to < 6	16.28		1.16			1.16
	Less than 2	3.49					
KISAN (26.75)	10 acres & above						
	6 to < 10						2.33
	2 to < 6				3.49	5.81	13.95
	Less than 2						1.16
MAZDOOR (41.06)	10 acres & above						
	6 to < 10						
	2 to < 6			1.16			
	Less than 2			38.39		1.16	1.16

Note: Figures give percentage of total number of households.

TABLE - 2.32

CASTE-CLASS ASSOCIATION

VILLAGE DAHO

		% distribution			
	Size Class ownership holdings	Sao (keshari)	Bhuiya	Parahia	Korwo
MALIK (1.30)	10 acres & above	1.30			
	6 to < 10				
	2 to < 6				
	Less than 2				
KISAN (9.04)	10 acres & above				
	6 to < 10		1.30		
	2 to < 6		3.90	3.90	
	Less than 2				
MAZDOOR (89.61)	10 acres & above				
	6 to < 10		6.49		1.30
	2 to < 6		37.67	19.48	6.48
	Less than 2		9.09	1.30	
	Landless		5.19	2.60	

Figures give % of total households

Kahars, Lohars are similarly distributed. However Yadav households only occur among the top category maliks owning ten acres or more. In Shripalpur again as we have noted earlier, it is a special case. Being a Harijan tola it has only one caste of Chamars who are either kisans or mazdoors. There are no maliks in the village. But the maliks in neighbouring villages for whom these Chamar mazdoors work are usually Rajputs in this area.

#### 4. Asset Transactions

Apart from constructing asset profiles of the different classes at a point of time the survey also attempted to capture possible tendencies over time. For this purpose respondents in the villages were asked about their asset transaction over the last five years. The responses have been tabulated in tables 2.41 to 2.44 below. In interpreting these we must of course keep in mind the obvious limitation imposed by lapses in recall about events spread over a five years period. On the other hand it is also true that the sale or purchase of assets like land or bullocks are indeed major events in the life of a peasant which he is unlikely to forget easily.

The main feature which stands out is the extremely limited sale or purchase of land, bullocks and other

TABLE - 2.33

CASTE-CLASS ASSOCIATION

VILLAGE JORI

% distribution

Ownership holdings		Munda	Oroan	Nagasia	Kisan	Kahar	Lohār	Yadav
MALIK (29.4)	10 acres & above	1.96	3.92		1.96	1.96		1.96
	6 to < 10	3.92	7.85		3.92			
	2 to < 6		1.96					
	Less than 2							
KISAN (27.45)	10 acres & above	1.96						
	6 to < 10	5.88	7.85	1.96	1.96			
	2 to < 6		1.96	1.96		1.96	1.96	
	Less than 2							
MAZDOOR (43.13)	10 acres & above	3.92	1.96					
	6 to < 10	3.92	1.96					
	2 to < 6	9.82	1.96	1.96	1.96	1.96		
	Less than 2	3.92		3.92				
	Landless	1.96	1.96				1.96	

Figures give % of total households

TABLE - 2.34  
CASTE-CLASS ASSOCIATION  
VILLAGE SHRIPALPUR

		% distribution
	Ownership holdings	Chamar
	10 acres & above	
MALIKS	6 to < 10	
(0.00)	2 to < 6	
	Less than 2	
All Maliks		
	10 acres & above .	
KISANS	6 to < 10	
(16.67)	2 to < 6	16.67
	Less than 2	
	10 acres & above	
MAZDOORS	6 to < 10	8.33
(83.33)	2 to < 6	58.33
	Less than 2	16.67
	Landless	

Figures give % of total households

assets in all the villages. Relatively speaking the transaction are most frequent, if we may use that word, in Chatti. This is only to be expected because, as we have seen earlier, the extent of differentiation is most advanced in Chatti compared to the other villages and so we may normally expect the process to have acquired a greater momentum in this village relative to the others.

Thus except for one or two isolated cases there has been practically no buying or selling of land in Daho, Jori or Shripalpur in the last five years. But Chatti has been a little more active in this regard. In all some 8.34 acres have been sold as against purchases of 5.01 acres implying that there has been a net sale to owners outside the village of some 3.33 acres. In these transactions the main sales have come from maliks or kisans owning less than two acres (1.48 acres per household and 0.12 acres per household respectively). While the maliks in this category, poor Brahmins mainly, are indeed being squeezed out and are most likely to move away from the land altogether, the picture is less clear in the case of kisans of this category for they have also bought some land (0.07 acres per household). Clearly there is upward as well as downward mobility here and some households are accumulating assets while others are losing it. Kisans in



TABLE - 2.41

ASSET TRANSACTIONS IN LAST FIVE YEARS

VILLAGE CHATTI

acres/numbers per household

Size Class Onwership holdings	IT ITEMS SOLD				ITEMS BOUGHT					
	Land	Bullocks	Other Live- stock	Ploughs	Other imple- ments	Land	Bullocks	Other Live- stock	Ploughs	Other imple- ments
10 acres & above	0.75 acre	1	-	-	-	1 acre	4	-	4.5	-
MALIKS 6 to < 10						0.08 acre	1.33		8.33	
2 to < 6						0.02 acre				
Less than 2							0.33		0.33	
10 acres & above										
KISANS 6 to < 10						0.28 acre	1		1	
2 to < 6										
Less than 2	0.12 acre	0.19				0.07	1.14	0.09	1.95	
10 acres & above										
6 to < 10										
2 to < 6										
Less than 2		0.07	0.03				0.07		0.17	

Note: Transaction are expressed as averages per household for each size group in each class.

the category 2 to 6 acres have also been buying land (0.28 acres per household). All other purchases are by the top three malik size groups (1 acre, 0.08 acres and 0.02 acres per household respectively). It will be recalled that there are no kisans in these large size groups in Chatti.

In the case of bullocks also we find in Chatti that the main purchases have been concentrated among maliks in the two largest size groups (4 and 1.33 bullocks per household respectively) and kisans in the category 2 to 6 acres (1 per household) and less than 2 acres (1.14 per household). Sales of bullocks in the village are found among kisans and mazdoors in the less than 2 acres category (0.19 and 0.07 bullocks per household respectively). The purchase of ploughs is also found mainly among maliks and kisans owning two to six acres of land or less than two acres of land. There are hardly any reported purchases of other livestock or implements.

In Daho there has been practically no sale of land or any other assets in the last five years nor any purchase of land. Some purchase of bullocks and ploughs are reported for both kisans and mazdoors in the middle categories. Maliks, belonging entirely to the above 10 acres size group here, have reported

TABLE - 2.42  
AVERAGE ASSET TRANSACTIONS IN LAST FIVE YEARS

VILLAGE DAHO

,        acres/numbers per household

Size Class Ownership holdings	ITEMS SOLD				ITEMS BOUGHT			
	Land	Bullocks	Other Live- stock	Ploughs imple- ments	Land	Bullocks	Other Live- stock	Ploughs imple- ments
MALIKS	10 acres & above					2	1	25
	6 to < 10							1 Pump- ing set
	2 to < 6							
	Less than 2							
KISANS	10 acres & above							
	6 to < 10					4		20
	2 to < 6	0.08				0.67		5
	Less than 2							
MAZDOORS	10 acres & above							
	6 to < 10					0.33		2.5
	2 to < 6				0.05			0.51
	Less than 2							

**Note:** Transactions are expressed as averages per household for each size group in each class.

purchases of bullocks, ploughs, some other livestock and a pumping set.

In Jori once again there have been only a few stray cases of sale of land or any other assets and practically no purchases of land. However we notice (table 2.43) substantial purchases of bullocks and ploughs among the top categories of maliks, the middle categories of kisans and, strangely, all categories of mazdoors!

In Shripalpur we find almost no sale of any assets and some purchase of bullocks and ploughs by kisans and mazdoors belongs mainly to the size group 2 to 6 acres.

Thus summing up the evidence on asset transactions over the last five years in the surveyed villages we may say that the most striking feature is the very low level of transactions. There has been practically no sale of land or any other assets in any of the villages over the last five years except Chatti. There has also been hardly any buying of land, once again except in Chatti. The purchase of livestock other than bullocks or implement and machinery other than ploughs has also been negligible during this period. Bullocks and ploughs together form by far the most important items of asset purchases in all the four villages.

TABLE - 2.43  
AVERAGE ASSET TRANSACTIONS IN LAST FIVE YEARS

VILLAGE JORI

		acres/numbers per household									
Ownership holdings		I T E M S S O L D				I T E M S B O U G H T					
		Land	Bullocks	Other Live- stocks	Ploughs	Other imple- ments	Land	Bullocks	Other Live- stocks	Ploughs	Other imple- ments
10 acres & above								3.33		9.17	
MALIK	6 to < 10	0.13 acre	3.5				0.39 acres	3.25		6.38	
	2 to < 6										
	Less than 2										
10 acres & above											
KISAN	6 to < 10										
	2 to < 6							0.22		0.44	
	Less than 2							0.75		1.25	
10 acres & above											
MAZDOOR	6 to < 10		2					4.00		4.00	
	2 to < 6							1		0.67	
	Less than 2							1		1.67	
								1.25		2.50	

**Note:** Transactions are expressed as averages per household in each size group in each class.

However these purchases are spread across the different classes and give no indications of being concentrated in the malik class.

### 5. Conclusions

From the forgoing account of the distribution & transaction of assets we may now draw out the principal characteristics of class differentiation in the selected villages.

As yet there is only a very low level of differentiation in terms of land or any other asset distribution except in the case of Chatti. Here the concentration of land as well as other assets to the malik class, especially the top land holding size groups, is already far advanced. But this is not at all the case in the other villages. The same picture is reflected in the purchase and sale of assets. Once again we find that the extent of transactions is very low in all the villages except Chatti. Indeed there has been hardly any incidence of the sale of assets in any class in the other villages and whatever little purchase has been there has been more or less evenly spread across the classes. Even in Chatti we do not really find a vigorous market for transactions in land or other assets or a clear pattern of asset transfers from the poorer kisans or mazdoors to the richer sections



TABLE - 2.44

AVERAGE ASSET TRANSACTION IN LAST FIVE YEARS

VILLAGE SHRIPALPUR

	acres/numbers per household									
	I T E M S O L D			I T E M B O U G H T						
Ownership holdings	Land	Bullocks	Other Live-stock	Plough	Other imple-ments	Land	Bullocks	Other Live-stock	Plough	Other imple-ments
10 acres & above										
MALIKS										
6 to < 10										
2 to < 6										
Less than 2										
10 acres & above										
KISANS										
6 to < 10										
2 to < 6										
Less than 2										
10 acres & above										
MAZDOORS										
6 to < 10										
2 to < 6										
Less than 2										

Note: Transactions are expressed as averages per household in each size group in each class.

of the maliks. In other words in terms of the distribution and transaction of land or other assets we find that the level of differentiation is generally very low.

A second important feature deriving from the first is the very low incidence of purely landless labour. Even in Chatti the number of landless labour households is very small but this is more so in the other villages. Of course because the concentration of land in Chatti is already well advanced, the average holding size of not only mazdoors but also kisans is very small (0.75 acres and 0.85 acres respectively). But in the other villages even the average holding sizes are much larger. Ranging from between two acres to over four acres for mazdoors and between two acres to nearly seven acres in the case of kisans.

Finally a comparison of the reported distribution of ownership holdings with that of operational holding indicates that the incidence of tenancy is marginal. We have reason to believe that there is some under reporting of land leasing such that the actual extent of tenancy may be more than what the data indicates. But this does not vitiate the conclusion, indicated here as well as in other surveys cited above, that the incidence of tenancy is generally low in Palamau.



CHAPTER - III

ANALYSIS OF HOUSEHOLDS II

PRODUCTION & CONSUMPTION

In the previous chapter we have seen from our analysis of assets and asset transaction of households in the surveyed villages that the extent of differentiation in Palamau is still limited. Nevertheless the two basic classes of maliks and mazdoors are already identifiable along with the rest of the peasantry, the kisans, who have yet to be integrated into the capital-labour relationship. In order to locate these classes within the overall structure of production relations in agriculture it is necessary to analyse the nature of households in each class as ultimate economic units of that class. This has been attempted in the present chapter. For this purpose apart from using conventional data we have also constructed 'typical' consolidated budgets of households as producing-cum-consuming units. This has been done separately for each size group in a class in the each village. The limitations of data notwithstanding the exercise has thrown up some interesting indices of deficits and indebtedness which, as we shall see subsequently, function as the principal basis of bondage.

## 1. THE KISAN HOUSEHOLDS

Apart from the two basic classes of malik and mazdoor there is still a large section of rural households in Palamau who cannot be treated as either mazdoor households distinctly subordinated to capital or malik households who basically derive their livelihood from the surplus product of labour employed by them. Our principal interest in this study centres around the relationship between maliks and mazdoors since the prevailing phenomenon of bondage is basically, as we shall see later, a moment of the formal subsumption of labour under capital in the specific circumstances of Palamau. Nevertheless it is necessary first to analyse and set aside, as it were, the kisan households who have yet to be integrated within the labour-capital relationship and who thus demarcate in a sense the limits of penetration by this relationship in Palamau's agriculture.

### 1.1 Cultivation

The principal economic activity of the kisans is cultivation, the basic data for which has been reproduced in tables 3.12 to 3.13. It will be noted from table 3.11 that with the exception of Jori in all the villages the net area sown by this class is more

TABLE - 3.11  
KISANS: LAND USE

	Chatti	Daho	Jori	Shripalpur
Net area sown (acres)	21.48 (108.74)	23.50 (95.64)	50.57 (52.91)	4.66 (104.95)
Land Irrigated (acres)	3.07 (15.54)	nil	22.82 (23.88)	1.29 (0.29)
Cropping intensity	135.25%	102.12%	106.33%	146.35%

Figures in parenthesis give % of area owned



TABLE -3.12

KISAN: YIELD PER ACRE

(in quintals)

	V I L L A G E S			
	Chatti	Daho	Jori	Shripalpur
Paddy	3.83	1.10	3.45	-
Wheat	1.86	-	1.58	1.40
Maize	2.46	1.12	2.04	1.49
Coarse Grain	2.33	0.72	1.21	0.85
Oilseeds	0.65	0.16	0.47	0.68
Pulses	-	0.26	0.60	0.83

or less the same as the amount of land owned by them, the implication being not only a limited extent of leasing in or leasing out but also a high rate of land utilisation. The exception in the case of Jori is largely attributable to uncultivable uplands. However while utilisation of owned land is high the cropping intensity is extremely low. Furthermore the extent of irrigation is very limited and the use of chemical fertilisers, high yielding variety seeds etc. is negligible. Let alone the use of tractors, even iron plough are not yet in use. Consequently the yield rates are also extremely low on kisan lands. Most of the kisan holdings are concentrated in size groups of less than 2 acres or 2 to 6 acres.<sup>1</sup> Consequently with the cropped area per household being limited and such low cropping intensity and low yield rates it is not surprising that the maximum component of land is allocated to food crops to meet home consumption as far as possible. Thus around 95% of gross cropped area is allocated for food grains in all the villages, though there are variations in the choice of foodgrains between villages (see table 3.13),

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1. In Jori the kisan households tend to have larger holdings but we have just seen that here the proportion of owned land which is cultivated is quite low such that the actual cropped area available to the average kisan household is very limited even here.

TABLE - 3.13

KISANS: PERCENTAGE OF AREA UNDER DIFFERENT CROPS

(%)

	V I L L A G E S			
	Chatti	Daho	Jori	Shripalpur
Paddy	45.03	14.58	51.90	-
Wheat	19.25	-	6.57	29.33
Maize	25.41	29.18	21.70	31.67
Coarse Grain	8.23	52.08	12.91	32.26
Oilseeds	2.07	2.08	0.35	3.22
Pulses	-	2.08	6.57	3.51
Total	99.99%	100.00%	100.00%	99.99%

Note: Total is sometimes less than 100% because of rounding off.  
Percentages are with respect to land operated by kisans.

and even the remaining portion is allocated to oilseeds and pulses which are also directed for home consumption.

## 1.2 Production-Consumption Budget

Inspite of almost the entire cropped area in kisan lands being allocated to foodcrops for home consumption it is extremely significant that kisan households in Palamau are deficit households or near deficit households who just about break even.

For examining this aspect we constructed per capita income-expenditure accounts for different categories of kisans in all the selected villages. These accounts are consolidated production - consumption budgets constructed from the per capita averages of each budget component for all kisan households in each size group. From these per capita production - consumption budgets reproduced in table 3.14 it will be evident that most kisan households are either deficit or near deficit.

Total production per capita ranges from as little as 0.60 quintals for holdings of less than 2 acres at Chatti to a maximum of 4.05 quintals per head in holdings over two acres in Jori. The corresponding net produce per capita after eliminating seed requirements works out to 0.46 quintals and 3.38 quintals respectively. As against this normal grain requirements per



capita are around 2.52 to 3.00 quintals per head per annum except in Daho where it is about 1.5 quintals. The gap is met in Daho by Gatthi, Kandh and other roots, available in the forests around the village, on which the kisans and mazdoors depend for nearly 4 to 5 months of the year. Thus comparing home production to home consumption<sup>2</sup> we find a production deficit for all categories of kisan households in all the villages except the more than two acre size group in Jori. These grain deficits range from between 0.19 quintals to over 2 quintals per capita. In value terms these quantities work out at between Rs.24.47 to Rs.262.65 per head per annum.

In addition to the cost of purchasing these grain deficits other cash expenditures include the cost of production inputs other than seed and also the cost of purchased consumer items other than foodgrain. Against this there are non-farm cash incomes. In Chatti such income comes from teaching in schools, minor government services or artisan trades such as pottery. This works out to Rs.338.50 per head and Rs.428 per head for households owning less than two acres and households owning 2 to 6 acres respectively. In Jori off-farm cash

- 
2. For the purpose of constructing these budgets all grains have been combined into a composite category. For converting quantities into values a weighted average price - weighted according to production of different grains - was used. Oilseeds were left out of both production and consumption in the budget calculations.



income adds up to over a hundred rupees per head per annum - this income coming mainly from the sale of firewood and labour services in development projects organised by a local Christian mission. In Daho off-farm income is negligible, there being hardly any sources of such employment and in Shripalpur also there is no off-farm income.

### 1.3 Deficits Households & Debt

The final income - expenditure balance indicated in the last row of the table indicates that most kisan households either just break even or are actually deficit. In Shripalpur we find an exceptionally large deficit of over Rs.200 per head. It will be recalled that Shripalpur is just a small tola with a few Chamar families. As it happens in the year of the survey most of these families had gone in for large scale mortgaging of land against loans ostensibly taken to construct wells. In fact these loans were used largely to meet the consumption deficits. Apart from Shripalpur in kisan households in the other villages we find on the average small sur-  
averages over several households and since  
pluses or deficits. Since these tables are only responses to the questionnaires are necessarily approximate, these budgets can only be taken as roughly indicating the orders of magnitude involved. <sup>It</sup> would be incorrect to assume extreme

accuracy in the budgets. Taking such a broad view we may only say that the kisan households are by and large on the verge of subsistence, sometimes reducing their consumption to even less than that of mazdoors, and that particularly the households in smaller size groups are already deficit households forced into debt. This phenomenon of even the kisan households being deficit or near deficit has far reaching implications.

It was pointed out earlier that the extent of differentiation in Palamau is very limited and furthermore that the class of kisans marked as it were the limits of differentiation and the penetration of money and markets. Indeed we have seen that production by kisan households is almost entirely the production of food crops for home consumption. But even here we see a number of ways in which the average kisan household is already having to encounter the market. Given his limited size of holding, low cropping intensity and low productivity, the kisan can produce only a part of his grain requirement. The remainder has to be purchased in the market along with other essential consumer items such as clothes and also in some cases certain production inputs. In order to make such purchases he needs cash. For this he may again be selling his

labour-either unskilled or skilled as in the case of artisans. And if he is unable to find such alternative sources of income he must ultimately search for loans i.e. appear as a buyer in the rural credit market.

It must be pointed out in this context that the reported extent of debts is small and bears no comparison with the estimated budgetary deficits. Cross checks on the field in fact showed that the direct responses on indebtedness were suspect. Consequently we have preferred to use the estimated household budget deficits as indirect measures of indebtedness rather than the direct responses themselves. And while we may make some allowance for over stating expenses of understating incomes, the fact remains that the phenomenon of indebtedness appears to be extremely widespread even among kisans.

In other words while the class of kisans have yet to be integrated within the labour-capital relationship, we see that the class has already been forced by their poverty into dependence on capital in the form of money lending. And it is precisely through this modus operandi of indebtedness that capital first begins to alienate land from the impoverished peasantry.

## 2. THE MALIK HOUSEHOLDS

We now turn to the class of landowners whose primary means of livelihood is the surplus (production - wages and inputs) produced by the labour which they employ and supervise. However it has to be emphasised at the very outset that apart from the relationship vis-a-vis labour this class is not homogenous in any other aspect. Indeed we have demonstrated in chapter II above that the class can be highly differentiated within itself.

In Shripalpur, because of its special character as a tola of harijan labourers,<sup>3</sup> we do not have any maliks at all. <sup>The</sup> maliks who not only employ the mazdoor households of the village but also own a large part of the land in the revenue mouza are all residents from other neighbouring villages. In Daho we have only maliks owning more than ten acres. In Jori the maliks are spread across land ownership categories of more than 10 acres, 6 to 10 acres and 2 to 6 acres. In Chatti maliks are found who own even less than two acres.

Thus while there are maliks who are affluent land owners there are also maliks who are themselves <sup>as</sup> extremely poor. In fact we shall see subsequently they

3. See the village notes in Chapter-I above.

TABLE - 3.21

MALIKS: LAND USE

	Chatti	Daho	Jori
Land owned (acres)	153.48	36.42	152.85
Net area sown (acres)	127.10 ( 82.81)	36.50 (100.22)	78.84 (51.58)
Area Irrigated (acres)	42.65 (27.79)	5.00 (13.73)	33.98 (22.23)
Cropping intensity	123.74%	113.70%	101.88%

Figures in parenthesis give % of area owned

are also deficit households like most of the kisan families in Palamau. But they are still maliks whose agricultural operations are based mainly on the employment of outside labour. Such cases are found in Chatti among the Pandey Brahmins who are extremely poor but still prevented by caste taboos from taking up the plough themselves. Most of them have turned in search of other sources of employment such as petty government jobs, school teaching etc. But they still remain dependent on agriculture. And since they are unable to invest in high productivity agriculture, their only means of extracting surplus for themselves is the extreme physical exploitation of labour.

## 2.1 Cultivation

The maliks of Chatti own land not only in Chatti but in other neighbouring villages as well, such that against a total mauza size of 75 acres the maliks alone altogether own over 150 acres. In Jori also they control a little over a 150 acres but in this case the mouza size is over 900 acres. Finally in Daho the maliks of the village own only about 36 acres as against a mauza size of over 900 acres. But as in Shripalpur so also in Daho a part of the land in the mauza belongs to residents of other neighbouring villages. In Chatti about 83% of



-: 100 :-

TABLE - 3.22

MALIKS: PERCENTAGE OF AREA UNDER DIFFERENT CROPS

(%)

	Chatti	Daho	Jori
Paddy	51.94	48.19	53.41
Wheat	18.62	12.05	6.96
Maize	12.14	12.05	29.77
Coarse grains	-	12.05	7.39
Oilseeds	6.56	3.61	0.84
Pulses	9.53	12.09	1.62
Others	1.21	-	-

Note: Percentages are with respect to gross  
cropped area on land owned by the class  
of maliks

of the maliks owned area is put under crop as compared to only around 50% in Jori and over 100% in Daho. The cropping intensity of maliks in Jori is again the lowest at 101.88%, inspite of 22.23% irrigation, as compared to 113.70% in Daho where only 13.73% of the land owned by the maliks is irrigated. In Chatti the proportion of malik land which is irrigated is 27.79% and the cropping intensity is 123.74% (see table 3.21).

The large bulk of malik land also is put under foodgrains. As compared to 90% or more in kisan lands, the proportion of cropped area under foodgrains in malik lands is around 80% to 85%, the rest of the land being allocated to pulses, oilseeds and, in Chatti, some sugarcane and potatoes. What is interesting however is the difference in the mix of foodgrains. Thus coarse grains which occupy a large share of kisan lands account for only 12.05%, 7.39% <sup>and</sup> 0% of malik lands in Daho, Jori and Chatti respectively. Paddy on the other hand uniformly accounts for about 50% of cropped area in malik lands in all three villages. Maize and wheat together account for another 25% to 40% of cropped area (table 3.22).

The use of inputs and the level of technology in malik farms is not much better than in kisan farms. There is a marginal use of chemical fertiliser by one

or two malik households owning around 20 to 30 acres of land but there was not a single case of use of new high yielding variety seeds. There was also not a single case of the use of tractors among the surveyed households and even the ploughs used are still light wooden ploughs drawn by small bullocks. This is consistent with the data presented in chapters I and II earlier which show that the use of tractors or iron ploughs is still a very recent and limited phenomenon in Palamau. Furthermore we have seen above that the extent of irrigation is also quite limited even on malik lands.

This low level of technology, inputs and irrigation reflects itself in extremely low productivity as in the case of kisan farms. In fact in some cases, e.g. paddy and maize in Jori or wheat in Chatti, the yield rate actually turns out to be lower than on kisan lands. The yield rates per acre of different crops in malik lands in the three villages is presented in table 3.23. For paddy the yield rate varies from 2 to 4.54 quintals per acre. For wheat, maize and coarse grains it is about 1.5 quintals to 3 quintals per acre. For oilseeds and pulses the yield varies between 0.56 quintals to 1.33 quintals per acre only.

TABLE - 3.23

MALIKS: YIELD PER ACRE

	(in quintals)		
	Chatti	Daho	Jori
Paddy	4.54	2.00	3.22
Wheat	1.49	2.00	2.07
Maize	2.73	1.20	1.55
Coarse grains		2.00	1.52
Oilseeds	0.67	1.33	0.57
Pulses	0.83	0.80	0.56
Others	-	-	-

## 2.2 Production-Consumption Budgets

The net economic position of a peasant household whether kisan, malik or mazdoor can be captured in terms of household budgets where each household is seen as a consuming unit as well as a producing unit. In general most households would have both these aspects. Such budgets are presented in table 3.24 for malik households of different size groups in the three villages.<sup>4</sup>

Starting from the top of the table we notice first of all that compared to the kisan budgets (table 3.14) a new item - the grain wage bill - has appeared as a new cost item in the maliks budget. And it is interesting to note that this wage component of of total produce increases with the decrease in size of holding. Thus from a minimum of about 15% of total produce in the largest holdings the wage component goes up to around 37% in the smallest holdings. This increasing wage component with declining size of holding implies that as we move from large to small holdings the surplus component of total product declines and the smaller

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4. As in the kisan budgets presented in section 1.2 above & the mazdoor budgets which follow the data is presented per capita rather than per household. This has been done in order to incorporate the effect of family size which, as we have seen in chapter-II, varies significantly between size groups of holdings.

maliks have to push their labourers the most in order to extract their surplus. As we shall see in chapter-V below this fact is also reflect in their employment of bonded labour.

A comparison of the surplus or net grain produce available per capita with the normal grain requirement per capita in different size groups of malik households shows that households owning six acres or less are deficit in grain and have to buy in the market. To this grain surplus or deficit, converted into cash value, we have to add non-farm income. And from this we need to deduct cost of inputs other than seed and expenditure on consumption other than foodgrains to arrive at the net balance in household budgets.

It turns out that most of the malik households also just about break even, a significant surplus accruing only to the largest size class of malik owning more than ten acres. At the other end we find maliks in the less than 2 acres category who are heavily deficit. These are mainly the Pandey Brahmin households in Chatti we have already referred to earlier. So far they have met the deficits through sales of land, but their land base is already very small and it will not be long before they are squeezed off the land.





Secondly, we find, as expected, that the quantum of surplus decreases (deficits increase) as we move to smaller holding size groups. In Jori, where this pattern is violated, it will be noticed that the balance is positive here because of an unusually large sum of non-farm income. This has happened only because of the exceptional situation of a couple of families in this category who have found relatively lucrative jobs in the nearby catholic mission.

### 2.3 A LACK OF INVESTIBLE SURPLUS

The essential point to be grasped in the foregoing analysis is that though they are maliks, the malik households in Palamau are also generally poor. No one except the very largest land owners have savings which they may invest in agriculture. And even these large landowners who have such surpluses invariably also have business interests outside agriculture - especially in various types of trade and government contracts.

Thus very little of the surplus extracted from agriculture is recycled into agriculture. And the spread of modern technology, whether mechanical or biochemical, has consequently been marginal even among the class of maliks while the extent of irrigation remains limited. The level of productivity on malik farms is not much more than that on the kisan farms.

And where the productivity remains so low the main thrust of extracting surplus is of course on the extreme physical exploitation of labour. As we shall see below this fact is central to an understanding of the phenomenon of bondage in Palamau.

### 3. THE MAZDOOR HOUSEHOLDS

The third and, from our point of view, the most important class is the class of mazdoors whose principal source of livelihood is the sale of their labour power. It is within the ranks of this class that we find that unfortunate creature - the bonded labourer. However it is not yet our immediate purpose here to analyse the latter. We shall attempt here only an assessment of the mazdoor class as a whole, their economic situation and conditions of living, completing thereby our description of the total structure of agrarian relations within which the system of bonded labour perpetuates itself in Palamau.

#### 3.1 Wage Income and Employment

The principal source of livelihood of the mazdoor is wage labour. In Palamau wages are generally paid in kind, the cash equivalent being paid for certain days if the labourer requests the malik to pay a cash wage so that he can purchase one or another item of

consumption. There is not much variation in the daily wage rate for ploughing, sowing and other operations except harvesting. But what is surprising is the large variation in wage rates for the same operation between different villages even though they are all in the same district. Thus while the average daily wage rate is about 3 kg. of grain<sup>5</sup> in Jori it goes down to 1.75 kg. in Chatti and Shripalpur - and only 1.50 kg. in Daho (table 3.31). In the case of harvesting however the wage rate appears to be quite uniform between the selected villages i.e. one bundle out of every 22 bundles which are harvested. On the average this works out to roughly 4.00 kg. per day for a normal working day at the average intensity of work.

There are also variations in the number of days for which employment is available for a particular operation in the different villages (table 2.71). Thus ploughing operations provide on the average about 25 to 30 days of employment in Jori and Daho whereas in Shripalpur and Chatti it provides about 39 days and 44 days respectively. Sowing and other operations prior to harvesting provide about 18 to 25 days of employment

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5. The wage is generally paid in the same grain which is being grown. However the choice remains with the malik who may, and quite frequently does, pay the wage in an inferior grain when superior grains like paddy or wheat are being grown.

in Shripalpur, Jori and Daho as compared to 34 days in Chatti. Harvesting on the other hand provides only 5 days of employment on an average in Chatti as compared to 12 or 13 days in the other villages.

While these variations may be partly explained by differences in cropping pattern and the cropped area in relation to the number of labourers available in a particular village, the principal explanation seems to be in terms of labour mobility. Thus in Chatti which is located among a cluster of other easily accessible villages the labourers also find employment outside the village for ploughing and sowing operations. This also holds to some extent for Shripalpur. But it is not possible in Daho and Jori which are isolated villages typical of the afforested hilly blocks in the district. Conversely at the time of harvesting, when maliks are anxious to have the operation completed as quickly as possible, outside labour is employed in Chatti, such that the labourers resident in the village find employment for a smaller period.

The greater mobility of labour in Chatti also reflects itself in off farm employment outside the village. Nearly two months of such employment as coolies is available with private contractors in roadworks etc.

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TABLE - 3.31

MAZDOOR: EMPLOYMENT AND WAGES

	CHATTI			DAHO			JORI			SHRIPALPUR		
	Mandays	Wage	Employed	Mandays	Wage	Employed	Mandays	Wage	Employed	Mandays	Wage	Employed
Ploughing	44.04	1.75Kg.	28.51	1.50Kg.	25.83	3.00Kg.	38.72	1.75Kg.	18.33	1.75Kg.	4.00Kg.	57.78
Sowing etc.	33.94	1.75Kg.	25.25	1.50Kg.	17.68	3.00Kg.	13.02	4.00Kg.	N.A.	N.A.	N.A.	2.61Rs.
Harvesting	4.97	4.00Kg.	13.63	4.00Kg.	11.32	4.00Kg.						
Off-Farm Employment	57.78	2.61Rs.	-	-	N.A.	N.A.	N.A.	N.A.	N.A.	N.A.	N.A.	

N.B.: Mandays employed are with respect to the agricultural year. Wage rates are in kilograms of grain.



during the off season at Chatti. No such employment is available in the other villages. Typically both husband and wife go out to work as a couple in such off-farm operations outside the village. The women are paid a cash wage of Rs.2.50 per day as against Rs.2.75 or Rs.3.00 for the men, the average daily wage rate working out to Rs.2.61.

The aggregate number of days of employment per mazdoor and aggregate wage earnings in cash and kind per person in a year in the selected villages is presented in table 3.32. The total days of farm employment varies from about 55 days in Jori to about 83 days in Chatti. However because of higher wage rate in Jori the annual grain wage income per head is highest in Jori.<sup>6</sup> On the other hand the off farm employment of nearly two months in the year in Chatti gives them an additional cash income of Rs.150.81 on the average as compared to zero or negligible cash income in the other villages.

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6. It is necessary to point out here that the wage rate is higher in Jori because of a special factor i.e. the presence of an old Catholic mission in the block which controls a large parish where it conducts intensive cultivation. The mission has its own power generation, while the entire block is without electricity as yet, a complex of modern facilities including residential schools, colleges etc., tractors and scores of electric pumps for irrigating the field. The mission also pays the labourers the regulation minimum wage. And while it is the only employer to do so, it is nevertheless a very large employer such that their policy has forced up the general level of wages in the neighbourhood of the parish.

TABLE - 3.32

MAZDOOR: ANNUAL EMPLOYMENT & WAGE EARNING PER CAPITA

	Chatti	Daho	Jori	Shripalpur
Mandays of farm employment per capita	82.95	67.38	54.83	70.07
Mandays of Non-farm employment per capita	57.78	nil	N.A.	N.A.
Grain wage earnings per capita	160.00Kg.	135.14Kg.	178.19kg.	138.20 Kg.
Cash wage earnings per capita	150.81	nil	13.57	23.55

### 3.2 Own Production

In addition to their wage earnings most mazdoor households manage to produce some output of their own however small. We have already seen in Chapter-II that, the number of purely landless labourers is quite small in any of the selected villages. In Chatti and Shripalpur the average holding size per capita of mazdoors is only half an acre or less. <sup>In</sup> / Daho and Jori it goes up to 1.19 acres and 1.30 acres respectively (table 3.33). But while the average holding size of mazdoors in Jori is largest, the gross cropped area adds up to only 55.30% of owned area here as compared to between 103% to 115% in the other villages. Nevertheless the mazdoors in Jori also enjoy the highest rate of irrigation at nearly 19% of owned area as compared to about 5% or less in the other villages, such that the home production per capita of mazdoors is the highest in Jori at 0.75 quintals per annum (0.64 quintals net of seed requirements). In comparison the net own grain output of mazdoors in the other villages works out to between 0.22 to 0.29 quintals per capita per annum.

### 3.3 Household Budgets & Debt

As in the case of kisan and malik households, consolidated annual household budgets have also been constructed for the mazdoor class where wage earnings

TABLE - 3.33

MAZDOOR: LAND USE AND OWN OUTPUT PER CAPITA

	Chatti	Daho	Jori	Shripalpur
Area owned (acres)	0.54	1.19	1.30	0.37
Area Irrigated*	5.69%	nil	18.70%	4.79%
Gross area sown*	115.31%	103.09%	55.30%	108.27%
Grain total produce (quintals)	0.26	0.30	0.75	0.34
Seed Requirement (quintals)	0.04	0.05	0.13	0.06
Net grain produce per capita (quintals)	0.22	0.25	0.64	0.29

\* These percentages are with respect to area owned

and own productions have been brought together to be compared against consumption requirements. Once again the budgets have been presented per capita rather than per household in order to incorporate the effect of varying family sizes in comparisons with other classes.

The first striking feature of the budgets (table 3.34) is the large grain deficit of 1.02 quintals per capita in Chatti. This is inspite of mazdoors having the highest number of days of farm employment in this village. This happens because even though the grain wage income in Chatti is relatively high, the per capita grain consumption of mazdoors in Chatti is also the highest. In fact referring back to tables 2.54 and 2.64 it will be evident that mazdoors in Chatti consume more grain per capita than some categories of kisans or even maliks. Consequently the cash requirement for purchasing the grain deficit in the market is also the highest for mazdoors in Chatti and so is the expenditure on other consumption items (though here the differences are marginal). Nevertheless it will be recalled that mazdoors in Chatti also have a substantial cash wage income from off farm employment which mazdoors in other villages do not have. Consequently even though the average mazdoor household in Chatti is deficit, their quantum of deficit is the least.

In terms of deficit the mazdoors of Jori are the best off after Chatti. Their annual grain wage income is the highest because of a higher wage rate, as we have seen, but their consumption is lower than in Chatti such that they have a purchaseable grain deficit of only .07 quintals per head per annum. Nevertheless the Jori mazdoors lack the opportunity of off-farm employment such that their final cash deficit of Rs.67.29 per capita is more than in Chatti.

In this Dahho makes an interesting comparison with Jori. For even though Dahho does not enjoy a high grain wage rate like Jori, its purchaseable grain deficit is about the same as that of Jori. This is because of the much lower grain requirement in Dahho where both mazdoors and the poor kisans survive on Gatthi, Kandh and other roots from the surrounding forests for nearly 4 to 5 months of the year. Nevertheless mazdoors in Dahho have no cash income at all such that they ultimately end up with a larger cash deficit than the mazdoors of Jori.

Finally we have the mazdoors in Shripalpur who are undoubtedly the worst off in all respects. They neither have a high grain wage rate as at Jori, nor any consumable grain substitutes, however inferior, as in Dahho. Consequently they end up with a large purchaseable grain deficit like the mazdoors of Chatti. But again



TABLE - 3.34

MAZDOORS: CONSOLIDATED ANNUAL BUDGETS PER CAPITA

	Chatti	Daho	Jori	Shripalpur
Grain wage income per capita (quintals)	1.60	1.35	1.78	1.38
Own grain output per capita (quintals)	0.22	0.25	0.64	0.29
Annual grain requirement (quintals)	2.84	1.51	2.49	2.50
Estimated grain deficit (quintals)	- 1.02	- 0.09	- 0.07	0.83
Cash value of grain deficit (Rs.)	- 131.33	- 11.59	- 9.01	-106.86
Cost of other inputs (Rs.)	- 16.15	-	4.27	2.15
Other Consumption Expenditure (Rs.)	- 68.40	- 65.96	- 67.58	- 66.60
Annual Cash Income (Rs.)	151.01	-	+ 13.57	23.55
Annual Savings (Rs.)	- 64.87	- 77.55	- 67.29	-152.06

unlike the mazdoors of Chatti they do not have a compensating opportunity for cash wage employment outside the village, such that they end up with the largest cash deficit among mazdoors of all the selected villages. In fact while the largest cash deficit among the mazdoors of other villages is Rs.77.55 per capita the cash deficit in Shripalpur works out to twice this amount at Rs.152.06 per capita per annum. We had seen earlier that <sup>a</sup>/similar situation obtained for the kisan households in Shripalpur. Like them the mazdoors of Shripalpur have also mortgaged their land against loans to meet the gap. However this is no more than a temporary postponement of a persistent and impossible problem in Shripalpur and it appears to be well on the way towards total depopulation. If pressures persist, as they are likely to, then even the 12 remaining families of what is now just a harijan tola are also likely to migrate.

But these inter-village variations apart, what is most significant about the mazdoor household budgets is that in all the villages we find that the average mazdoor household is deficit. And it is important to stress that where a household is already living at the bare minimum of subsistence consumption, a deficit of the

order of Rs.65 to Rs.75 per capita is by no means negligible. Notice that the sum total of their consumption adds up generally to around 2.5 to 3.0 quintals of food-grain per year and a total consumption of all other items of only Rs.5.00 to Rs.6.00 per month. In other words their annual cash deficit is greater than their total expenditure on all consumption other than foodgrains.

Clearly the deficit of the average mazdoor household in Palamau is not something which he can wipe out. Taking this deficit to measure his annual requirement of a loan, it is clear that the mazdoors of Palamau are hopelessly dependent on debt. And as we shall see below it is this hopeless dependence of the mazdoor on his loans which the malik employs as his principal instrument in creating and perpetuating the system of bondage.

CHAPTER - IV

ECONOMICS OF BONDAGE - I

CONCEPTS & ORIGIN

1. THE REAL & FORMAL SUBSUMPTION OF LABOUR UNDER CAPITAL

Our analysis of households from the selected villages in the preceding two chapters describes the specific economic situations of households belonging to different economic classes i.e. the kisans, mazdoors and maliks. On the basis of this analysis we may now proceed to examine the nature of the relationships between the class of maliks and the class of mazdoors - in particular the relationship of bondage - which forms the central focus of our study.

1.1 Absolute and Relative Surplus

For this purpose it is useful to begin by clarifying certain concepts of economic surplus which are basic to our analysis. Out of a total<sup>1</sup> amount produced by a labourer on his maliks farm during a particular agricultural year one part goes back to him in the form of wages. Since this is a payment a malik necessarily has to make in order to employ the labourer and sustain production this is called the necessary part of the

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1. This total is net of inputs, wear & tear of implements etc.

product or simply necessary product. The remainder is the surplus product which accrues to the malik.

Total Product = Necessary Product + Surplus Product

It is evident that in the above expression it is Surplus Product which the malik is ultimately interested in maximising for it is this part which accrues to him. Basically there are two ways in which he can do this. One is to raise the productivity of labour such that from the same amount of labour a greater output is realised. This can be done by the application of better techniques, more or better inputs etc. But all this requires investment. An increase in the quantity of physical capital relative to labour which is technically known as the organic composition of capital\*. Such an increase in the size of the surplus product arising out of an increase in the size of physical capital relative to labour is described as an increase in relative surplus.

An alternative means of raising the quantity of surplus product which the malik can pursue is simply a harsher physical exploitation of the labourer as a substitute for investment in raising labour productivity. He can do this by either (a) cutting down the quantity of wages or necessary product while keeping the amount of labour hours fixed or (b) Lengthening the working day

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\* This is only a rough description not a rigorous definition of the concept.

by increasing the hours of work while keeping the level of wages or necessary product fixed or (c) by keeping both wages and hours of work fixed but simply pressurising the labourer to work harder or more intensively. By any of these methods or a combination of them the absolute amount of surplus product extracted from the labourer could be increased without any new investment or real increase in labour productivity. An increase of the surplus product on this basis, without any change in the size of physical capital relative to labour, is called an increase in absolute surplus.

Thus while there may be variations within a particular approach, basically there are these two approaches which a malik can follow in order to raise the size of his surplus product. One based on investment and increases in the productivity of labour which is called the increase of relative surplus. The other based on simply the harsher physical exploitation of labour which is called the increase of absolute surplus. As we shall see in the next section, this distinction in the basis of extracting surplus marks out two altogether different historical stages in the development of capitalist production. And this distinction is crucial to our grasp of the present structure of agrarian relations in Palamau.



It is necessary to explain also the concept of an investable surplus. The total surplus product accruing to the malik forms his income.<sup>2</sup> Out of this he will have to meet the consumption needs of his household. And if there is any surplus left over then that forms his investable surplus. Hence it is important not to confuse the notion of investable surplus with that of surplus product. Investable surplus is only that part of the surplus product which is left over and above the consumption requirements of his household. The existence of an investable surplus or the lack of it is crucial in determining whether the quantum of surplus produce can be maximised by increasing absolute surplus or increasing relative surplus. For it is only when the malik has an investable surplus that he can consider additional investments in raising labour productivity. On the other hand the availability of an investable surplus does not automatically ensure that the surplus will be invested on the farm for the malik may put his surplus in a more profitable investment elsewhere, e.g. trade, or simply fritter it away on luxury consumption.

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2. Note that this also is net of his input costs etc. since they were already netted out in defining the original total product.

The two modes of expansion of the surplus product discussed above, i.e. absolute surplus and relative surplus, correspond to two distinct historical stages in the development of capitalism. This is not to imply that absolute and relative surplus are mutually exclusive. The same enterprise may be trying to raise both at the same time. Or atleast some enterprises or branches of industry may be expanding absolute surplus while others are expanding relative surplus during the same period of time. It is the relative importance or dominance of one or the other means of expanding the surplus product in a particular historical period which marks out the specific stage of capitalist development during that period.

#### 1.2 The Formal Subsumption of Labour under Capital

When capital first makes its appearance in the sphere of production it does so only indirectly in the form of merchant capital or money-lenders capital which extracts surplus from the sphere of production but does so from the outside as it were. There is as yet no direct control of the sphere of production by capital. No subsumption of labour under capital. But these early forms of capital which precede the appearance of capitalist production as such also act as the modus

operandi of capital's penetration and control of the sphere of production itself. Generally they are the principal means of capital acquiring the existing means of production or agricultural land.

However even when capital appropriates the means of production and begins to directly control the sphere of production, "this change does not in itself imply a fundamental modification in the real nature of the labour process, the actual process of production". "On the contrary the fact is that capital subsumes the labour process as it finds it, that is to say, it takes over an existing labour process, developed by different and more archaic modes of production. And since that is the case it is evident that capital took over on available, established labour process. For example, handicraft a mode of agriculture corresponding to a small, independent peasant economy. If changes occur in these traditional established labour processes after their takeover by Capital, these are nothing but the gradual consequences of that subsumption. The work may become more continuous or orderly under the eye of the interested capitalist, but in themselves these changes do not affect the character of the actual labour process, the actual mode of working. This stands in striking contrast to

the development of/<sup>a</sup>specifically capitalist mode of production (large scale industry etc.), the latter not only transforms the situations of the various agents of production, it also revolutionizes their actual mode of labour and the real nature of the labour processes as a whole. It is in contradistinction to this last that we come to designate as the formal subsumption of labour under capital what we have discussed earlier, viz. the takeover by capital of a mode of labour developed before the emergence of capitalist relations. The latter as a form of compulsion by which surplus labour is exacted by extending the duration of labour time - a mode of compulsion not based on personal relations of domination and dependency, but simply on differing economic functions - this is common to both forms. However, the specifically capitalist mode of production has yet other methods of exacting surplus value at its disposal. But given a pre-existing mode of labour i.e. an established development of the productive power of labour and a mode of labour corresponding to this productive power, surplus - value can be created only by lengthening the working day i.e. by increasing absolute surplus value. In the formal subsumption of labour under capital this

is the sole manner of producing surplus - value".<sup>3</sup>

The above description by Marx, which we have quoted at some length here for its lucid exposition, establishes very clearly the decisive importance of absolute surplus as the sole means available to the capital owner to extract surplus product in that early stage of capitalist development when capital has already penetrated the sphere of production but done so without as yet transforming the pre-existing material - technical basis of the production process to match with its own needs. This is the stage which has been described as a purely formal subsumption of labour under capital.

### 1.3 The Real Subsumption of Labour under Capital

As against this early capitalism the more developed stage of real capitalism is described thus: "The general features of the formal subsumption remain viz. the direct subordination of the labour process to capital, irrespective of the state of its technological development. But on this foundation there now arises a technologically and otherwise specific mode of production - capitalist production - which transforms the nature of the labour process and its actual condition. Only when

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3. See Karl Marx - Capital Vol.1, Penguin edition, 1976, Appendix - Results of the Immediate Process of Production, p.1021. The terms surplus-labour and surplus value used by Marx here may be substituted by the term surplus produce for our purpose.



that happens do we witness the real subsumption of labour under capital".

"The real subsumption of labour under capital is developed in all the forms evolved by relative, as opposed to absolute surplus-value. With the real subsumption of labour under capital a complete (and constantly repeated) revolution takes place in the mode of production, in the productivity of the workers and in the relation between workers and capitalists".

"With the real subsumption of labour under capital, all the changes in the labour process already discussed now become reality. The social forces of production of labour are now developed, and with large scale production comes the direct application of science and technology. On the one hand capitalist production now establishes itself as a mode of production sui generis and brings into being a new mode of material production. On the other hand, the latter itself forms the basis of development of capitalist relations whose adequate form, therefore, presupposes a definite stage in the evolution of the productive forces of labour".<sup>4</sup>

The description of this later, more advanced form of real capitalist relations of production is provided here to establish by contrast the specificity of the more

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4. Karl Marx, op.cit., pp.1034-1035.



archaic and backward form of capitalist relations - which are nevertheless capitalist relations with labour subordinated to capital. Unlike in the latter in the former the employer does not have relative surplus as the basis of extracting larger quantities of surplus product from his labour. Instead the sole means available to him is increasing absolute surplus. Consequently, as we have explained earlier, increasing labour productivity is not a characteristic of this early structure of capitalist relations. This is substituted instead by the sheer intensified physical exploitation of labour - lengthening of the working day, etc. What we popularly call sweated labour.

Indeed it is precisely the possibility and the actual fact of continuing investment and a rising stock of physical capital in relation to labour, resulting in a constantly rising productivity of labour, which forms the real content of a transition from the one stage of capitalism to the other - from the formal to the real subordination of labour.

"It has already been noted that a definite and constantly growing minimum amount of capital is both the necessary precondition and the constant result of the specifically capitalist mode of production".<sup>5</sup>

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5. Karl Marx, op.cit., p.1035.

We have explained at some length the nature of absolute and relative surplus and the two distinct stages of capitalist development corresponding to these two forms of surplus because, as we shall argue immediately below, it is precisely the archaic, backward form of capitalist relations, based on the extraction of absolute surplus, which appeared towards the end of the 19th century in Palamau. The appearance of the system of bonded labour was in fact nothing but a specific form of the formal subsumption of labour under capital in Palamau's agriculture. And the persistence of this bonded labour system up to the present is again nothing but a symptom of the persistence of precisely this archaic backward structure of capitalist relations in Palamau's agriculture. Thus in exploring the future of this bonded labour system the central question is really the prospects of a transition from the formal to the real subordination of labour under capital in the structure of agrarian relations.

## 2. EMERGENCE OF THE KAMIUTI (Bonded Labour) SYSTEM IN PALAMAU

### 2.1. Penetration of Capital into Land

In the year 1895 a special order was passed in the Chotanagpur area by which the then existing ijaras, jagirs, minhai (revenue free) land grants and other

existing tenures were converted into permanent, heritable, transferable and non-resumable estates - either revenue paying or revenue free.<sup>6</sup> This was in effect the Permanent Settlement reaching Palamau a hundred years after its introduction in other parts of the Bengal Presidency. The order also explicitly provided for the application of the sale law to land in order to facilitate the realisation of revenue arrears through the auction of defaulting estates. Thus by a single stroke the entire structure of traditional rights on the land - originally deriving from sheer political power and social custom - had been reduced to the commodity form. Land now became a piece of private property to be bought and sold just like any other commodity on the market.

This new rule of property, moreover, was not merely juridical but had a real economic content. For by this time Palamau had already witnessed a substantial spread of capital not only in moneylending and trade but also manufacturing. The 1891 census, for instance, records that there were already 10,000 persons engaged in money lending and trade, their numbers doubling to reach 20,000 by 1921. There were also, by 1891, manufacturing enterprises in nearly sixty different branches of industry

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6. See P.C. Tallents - District Gazetteer, Palamau, 1926.

supporting a population of well over two lakhs. This amounted to over 13% of the districts population as compared to less than 10% being supported by the entire non-agricultural sector in recent years.<sup>7</sup> The first coal mine in Rajhara came up in 1847. The 'Bihar Cotton Road' was laid in 1863, following the cotton crisis of the American civil war to link the cotton growing areas of Palamau and Sirguja to the world cotton market via Calcutta. By 1902 Palamau had been connected to the railway network. A major cement plant had come up in the district by 1922. At this time the district was already a large exporter of lac, catechu, cement coal, oilseeds, animal fats, hides and skins; its imports consisting of grain, piece goods, sugar, salt, kerosene and tobacco.

Furthermore, in the hundred years or so which had passed since the introduction of the Permanent Settlement of 1793 a buoyant land market had already formed in the rest of the Bengal Presidency. After an initial sluggishness, land prices were rising rapidly by the latter half of the 19th century.- especially between 1859 - 69 and again between 1918 & 1929. And the prices

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7. See occupational statistics in Chapter-I above.

were indeed particularly high in Bihar at between ten to eighteen times the revenue demand as compared to less than eight times in Bengal.<sup>8</sup> Hence even though Palamau itself had been kept outside the Permanent Settlement, the district was now integrated within a larger regional economy which already had a well developed and buoyant market for land.

In other words capital had already established itself in the district by the end of the 19th. century along with a buoyant land market in the larger regional economy within which the district was now integrated. And capital was now also confronted by a tendency of rising agricultural prices. Following a series of droughts culminating in the terrible famine of 1897, when crop output fell by 40%, agricultural prices increased quite sharply at the turn of the century. And as indicated in table 4.21 below the first spurt was followed by a period of low prices around 1905, but by 1910-1915 they again showed a sustained rising trend which was still persisting in 1920.

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8. See B.B. Choudhury - Land Markets in Eastern India 1793-1940, pt. I: The Movement of Land Prices, Indian Econ. & Soc. Hist. Review, January-March, 1975, tables 4 & 5.

TABLE - 4.21  
FOODGRAIN PRICES IN PALAMAU

	Common Rice	Wheat	Maize	Grain
1875	1.68	2.34	1.23	2.05
1885	2.28	2.18	1.47	2.23
1895	2.96	2.77	2.22	2.85
1901	3.36	4.44	-	5.07
1905	2.23	2.73	-	2.37
1910	3.55	3.55	-	2.15
1915	4.74	-	3.65	4.44
1920	7.11	-	5.92	7.11

Source: Palamau Statistics 1900-1901 to 1910-11, Patna, 1913. District Gazeteers 1926, 1961.

Capital was thus ready by this time to move into agriculture as a new avenue of profitable enterprise in Palamau. And the final juridical hurdle in its path was removed as it were by the order of 1895.

This was followed by two important developments. On the one hand there was a sharp increase in the area brought under cultivation, the gross area sown going up from 3.86 lakh acres in 1911-12 to 6.19 lakh acres in 1921.<sup>9</sup> But alongside this there was also a large scale expropriation of the poor tenantry. Operating

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9. See Chapter-I above.



mainly through the instrument of usury, i.e. indebtedness - 'default' - land alienation, capital was alienating land from the tenantry at such an alarming rate that the British colonial administration had to issue fresh legislation, the Chotanagpur Tenancy Act of 1908, which specifically disallowed the alienation of land cultivated by peasants of the scheduled castes or tribes.<sup>10</sup>

## 2.2 Labour Migration and Debt Bondage

The penetration of capital into land occurred partly in the form of professional money lenders and merchants acquiring new interests in land. But it also took the form of moneyed families in the service of the old aristocracy or the colonial government acquiring new interests in land and even some of the old landlords now having their traditional rights converted into a new and profitable addition to their private asset portfolio.<sup>11</sup> An asset priced on the market and exchangeable against money capital. This was, in other words, the principal moment of capital penetrating into agriculture - the capitalisation of land.

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10. See K. Suresh Singh, op.cit., p.14.

11. See B.B. Choudhury - Land Markets in Eastern India 1793-1940, pt.II: The Changing Composition of the Landed Society, Indian Econ. & Soc. Hist. Review, April-June, 1975.

However the capitalisation of land was not the same as capital formation on the land. The new owners of land as capital were interested in extracting surplus from the land. But it was a different matter when it came to investing on the development of the land. It is instructive to observe for instance that while acreage went up from 3.86 lakh acres in 1911 to 6.19 lakh acres in 1921, area irrigated only went up during the same period from 61,000 acres to 90,041 acres i.e. the proportion of irrigated area to cropped area actually went down! The implications of this for cropping intensity and agricultural productivity are obvious.<sup>12</sup>

Surplus was thus to be extracted not by increasing relative surplus but by increasing absolute surplus. This was that initial archaic stage of capitalism in Palameau's agriculture when labour was only formally subordinated to capital, as opposed to its real subordination. The increasing physical exploitation of labour, not its rising productivity, formed the principal basis of extracting the surplus product. What capital now required in agriculture was thus the rural analogue of 'sweated labour' in industry.

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12. This must unfortunately remain an indirect inference since the relevant data on yields and intensity for this period are not available.

But for this purpose capital found the rural labour situation in Palamau extremely unfavourable. Right from the time of the Leslie settlement the tenantry of Palamau had experienced an increasing degree of impoverishment thanks to rack renting by the Jagirdars.<sup>13</sup> This had provoked a series of peasant rebellions during the first half of the 18th century. But resistance notwithstanding, the immiserisation of the tenantry continued unabated such that starting with 1859 we find a series of famines in the area. As a measure of the heavy burden of debt it is interesting to note that even in the settlement of 1916-20, after rents had in general been reduced by about 10%, the rate of rent in Palamau was between two to three times that in the contiguous districts of Ranchi and Hazaribagh where productivities were, if any thing, higher than in Palamau.<sup>14</sup> Added to this burden came the further pressure of land alienation and expropriation with the order of 1895. It was but natural under such hard conditions for the labouring population to look for opportunities of migration elsewhere. The improvement of communication and closer integration with the rest of the Bengal economy made

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13. See chapter-I above.

14. See S. Mundle - Palamau: Development in a Historical Perspective (mimeo) 1978.

this a real possibility by the late nineteenth century. Accordingly by the time of the 1891 census we find already a net out-migration of over one lakh thirty five thousand labourers per annum from the Lohardaga - Palamau region.<sup>15</sup> The large bulk of this migrating labour, adding up to roughly 1% of the total population per annum, was in fact migrating to the tea districts of North Bengal and Assam. By 1921 the average rate of migration had turned down, but the district was still losing very large numbers of labourers every year. And every time there was a drought or famine the migration rate would shoot up. Consequently the net growth of population was very small and even in 1921 the population density was less than 150 persons per sq. mile as compared to over 400 for the entire province.

Consequently as capital penetrated into agriculture, and the expanding area under cultivation threw up a rising demand for labour, capital was faced by this massive exodus of labour right from the very outset. Had the normal forces of demand and supply been allowed to play themselves out in these circumstances this would inevitably have led to a rising level of agricultural wages. However the only increase in wages recorded at this time was restricted to the non-agricultural sector, especially the relatively 'organised' sector in cement

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15. See Mundle Loc.cit. In 1891 Palamau was still a part of the Lohardaga district.

and railways. Agricultural wages were not, and could not, be allowed to rise. This was that initial stage of capitalist penetration of agriculture, which we have discussed above, where labour is only formally subordinated to capital. The labour process, the actual techniques and processes of production, were yet to be transformed into the high productivity technology of capitalism. And it was not high productivity but low wages and a long working day which alone could generate a surplus product. Absolute surplus, not relative surplus, was the key to extracting surplus. Clearly the maintenance of low wages and a long working day provided the very basis of profitable capitalist penetration of agriculture under these circumstances.

Thus while the demand and supply forces tended to push up the wage rate, capital could not profitably continue or even retain its penetration into agriculture unless it successfully imposed a low ceiling on the wage rate i.e. a long working day for a low daily wage. Here once again it used the modus operandi of usury, just as it did to alienate the land from the peasantry in the first place, to enforce a control on labour through the instruments of indebtedness and debt-bondage. The extremely weak economic position of the labourer and his altogether unavoidable depen-



dence on loans was being used to hedge against the demand and supply conditions of labour itself which were relatively favourable to him. In other words loans were given, to the labourer, in the 'credit market' at an extremely high price, the price itself being extracted from him in the form of an extremely low wage rate in the 'labour market', well below the wage rate which could normally have been thrown up by the forces of demand and supply in that 'market'.

In this context it is useful to examine the following contemporary account of bondage!<sup>16</sup>

"It used formerly to be argued that there was a competition among landlords for tenants and that the necessary consequence of this competition must be that the tenants were secured from oppression. This fallacy has now been exploded. The competition, such as it was, was not for tenants but for agricultural labourers and the conditions necessary to a free competition which might have been beneficial to the labourers if the demand for them exceeded the supply, were not present for the labourers were not at liberty to move freely about and work for the highest bidder". (Tallents op.cit., p.128, emphasis mine - S.M.).

And how were these labourers prevented from moving about freely and working for the highest bidder?

16. Reproduced from P.C. Tallents - District Gazetteer, Palamau, 1926.



"If a reliable census could be taken of the indebtedness of the district it would probably be found that the total cash debt was less than in most other districts. The reason for this would be not the solvency of the cultivating classes, but their poverty and backwardness, which causes them to contract debts usually on a small scale and often in kind....The fact that cash debt are usually on a small scale does not mean that they are quickly or easily repaid: The borrower escapes no more easily than he does elsewhere. The end of the rakes progress is the kamiuti bond described below". (Tallents, op.cit., p.130, emphasis mine - S.M.).

"The kamiuti bond is generally executed in the first instance when some poor man requires cash for a wedding or a funeral, or for payment of rent, or even for the purchase of food when times are bad. A bond is then agreed upon, which is usually reduced to writing but not registered. The borrower undertakes to labour for the lender as he may require until the original loan is repaid in cash. He usually receives a house rent free and about one sixth of an acre bari land, and possibly a small area of rice land, called palhath, in addition. He is to be remunerated for his labour on the days on which he gives a full day's work by 2 or 3 kachha seers of whatever foodgrain the master may find

it convenient to give: at harvest time he receives one out of every 21 (or 16) bundles he reaps, which amounts to about 15 kachha seers in two days. On the average he is likely to work on 2 out of 3 days in the year. His own remuneration is supplemented by less liberal rewards to his dependents for doing part-time jobs when required. It is clear that at this rate the kamia can never hope to save enough to pay off his original debt, even if other difficulties were not thrown his way. Once a kamia, always a kamia and the father of kamias unless he can somehow escape or disappear without paying his debt". (Tallents, op.cit., p.133, emphasis mine - S.M.).

The close correspondence of this contemporary account of the kamiuti system at the beginning of this century with our own analysis of the origin of the phenomenon is obvious. Nevertheless a few aspects of the system need to be particularly emphasised.

(a) First of all the crucial role of money lending is to be noted. Even though the principal object of the malik in getting hold of a kamiya or bonded labourer was to have cheap captive labour, the instrument which he used to achieve this object was credit i.e. just as with the alienation of land so also in the control of labour it was the usury form of capital which played the

pincer role in the penetration of agriculture by capital.

(b) However for money lending to successfully play this role it was essential that the labourer himself should be chronically in need of debt and so close to the brink of survival that he should never be able to get out of the debt trap.

(c) A minimum subsistence wage was thus a basis as well as desired result of the bonded labour system. It was the basis because it was the low wage and minimum consumption deficits which forced the labourer to get into debt and it was the debt which, in turn, provided the leverage for capital to subordinate labour to itself in a dependent relationship. It was also the result because, as we have stated, the whole object of the kamiuti system was to enable the malik to hold down the wage rate, against the forces of labour demand and supply, impose a long working day at a minimum daily wage and thus extract the maximum absolute surplus.

(d) Finally, it is important to note in our analysis that the origin of the kamiuti system followed the penetration of capital into agriculture and was in fact a ~~result~~ result of it. It was by no means a traditional pre-capitalist relationship which merely survived the penetration of capital into agriculture.

In this context it is important to distinguish the new relationship of Kamiuti or debt-bondage from the

traditional relationship of Begari or forced labour. At the time when Tallents wrote the Begari system still existed though it had already been abolished and was in fact already breaking down. He was careful to separate this traditional Begari labour system from the new labour system of Kamiuti which had recently emerged and ~~was~~ in fact growing in the 1920s inspite of the Bihar and Orissa Kamiuti Agreement Act which had already been enacted in 1920 in order to curb the system. The traditional Begari system of forced labour has really vanished today for all practical purposes and we shall see below that it is this Kamiuti system produced by capital which still survives.

If the foregoing analysis of the bonded labour system as a product of capital's penetration into agriculture is correct, then it would follow that the system should have emerged only towards the end of the 19th century i.e. after capital began moving into agriculture. Fortunately we have some independent statistical evidence to check this implication of our analysis. A survey of Kamiyas conducted during the settlement of 1916-20 not only showed that there were by this time nearly 60,000 Kamiyas in the district but also that two-third of them had got bonded as recently as ten years before the survey. The earliest cases of bondage, according to the survey, had appeared between twenty to thirty years before the survey, i.e. the last decade of the 19th century exactly as indicated by our analysis.



CHAPTER - V.

ECONOMICS OF BONDAGE - II

THE CONTEMPORARY STRUCTURE

1. PERSISTENCE OF BONDED LABOUR SYSTEM

In the preceding chapter we have seen how capital penetrated Palamau's agriculture from around the end of the 19th century, producing at the same time a structure of land and labour relations appropriate to its own requirements in the specific circumstances of Palamau. This penetration operated in two moments, the expropriation of land and the subordination of labour, the principal instrument in both cases being money-lending and debts.<sup>1</sup>

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1. For an excellent analysis of the similar role of usury capital in the context of the small peasantry of the Deccan in the late 19th century see J. Banaji - Capitalist Domination of the Small Peasantry: Deccan Districts in the late nineteenth century, Econ. & Pol. Weekly, Special Number, August, 1977. See also A. Das - Agrarian Unrest & Socio-Economic Change in Bihar C-1920-c.1978. Unpublished Ph.d. thesis, University of Calcutta, 1978, Chapter I & II.

For an analysis within a different analytical construct of what is essentially a similar phenomenon, usury as the instrument of control, in post-colonial Bengal see A. Bhaduri - A Study in agricultural backwardness under Semi-Feudalism, Econ. Journal, March, 1973. Extremely useful evidence of the role of money-lending in the control of land and labour in several states of eastern India is also given in A. Rudra - On the Interlinkage of Land, Labour and Credit Relations in Agriculture: An Analysis of Village Survey data in East India (mimeo) Indian Statistical Institute, Calcutta, 1978.



The Chotanagpur Tenancy Act of 1908, which was implemented through the Settlement of 1916-20 was explicitly aimed at curbing the expropriation of tenants' lands. The act actually forbade the alienation of land belonging to scheduled castes and tribes. Tenants were also now protected by the record of rights. But to the extent that the settlement successfully curbed the expropriation of the tenantry it also created the conditions for perpetuating bondage. Bondage, as we have seen earlier, was essentially designed to hold down wage rates below that dictated by demand and supply under conditions of heavy labour migration. Since such large scale migration had tapered off by the thirties, the 'free' wage rate may have approached subsistence thus obviating the need for enforced cheap labour under the system of bondage. But while the outflow of labour tapered off, so did the expansion of labour supply through expropriation of the tenantry - the latter being a direct consequence of the settlement. Labour therefore continued to be in short supply, thus necessitating the perpetuation of bondage as a special device employed by capital to enforce low wages.

In other words the settlement of 1916-20 contained expropriation but in that very process served to reify the backward structure of agrarian relations. A structure

which precluded the development of the production base and thus necessitated the continued reliance of capital on the squeezing of absolute surplus through debt bondage.

This structure of formal subordination of labour under capital, based on an extremely underdeveloped production base, persists to this day and with it the system of bondage. During the last decades of the colonial period peasant demands for land reform were increasingly articulated through the national movement in Palamau as elsewhere. Political independence and the installation of a new government thus brought with it the threat of land reforms. This, along with another wave of rising agricultural prices since the 2nd World War, once again catalysed a heightened pace of expropriation. But as we have seen earlier<sup>2</sup> this phase of expropriation ~~actually~~ 'levelled' the distribution of land. Differentiation moved in reverse, and to that extent it merely extended the effects of the 1916-20 settlement i.e. the perpetuation of a backward structure of agrarian relation based on an agriculture stagnant at extremely low levels of productivity.

Admittedly the large scale programme of public investment, especially in irrigation, in the post-colonial period has initiated a process of profound

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2. See Chapter-I parts 1 & 5 above.

changes in the material basis of Palamau's agriculture. So has the phenomenon of 'demographic differentiation' arising from accelerated population growth. But neither of these exogenous developments have led as yet to any major transformation of Palamau's agriculture or the structure of its agrarian relations.<sup>3</sup> And pending such a transformation the system of bonded labour still survives.

## 2. DEFICIT LABOUR HOUSEHOLDS & COMPULSION TO BONDAGE

Confronted with this survival of an archaic form of the capital-labour relationship a question immediately poses itself as to why the labourer accepts a contract of bondage. We have already found an answer to this question in our analysis of representative budgets from mazdoor households.<sup>4</sup>

It will be recalled from our analysis of chapter-III that a mazdoor household is chronically a deficit household. And this pattern is repeated in all the villages surveyed in our study irrespective of the different sizes of assets (land) held by mazdoors in these villages. At 1977 prices the annual cash deficit per capita varied from about Rs.65.00 to as much as Rs.152.06. And as we have pointed out, deficits of this order are by no means marginal or easily removable for households which are

3. See Chapter-I parts 1, 3 & 4 above.

4. See Chapter-III section 3 above.

already at the subsistence level of consumption i.e. grain consumption of about 2.5 to 3.00 quintals per head per annum and a total expenditure on all other items of barely Rs.5.00 to Rs.6.00 per month.

Given this chronic deficit of the average mazdoor household it is evident that he is hopelessly dependent on debt. And it is precisely such dependence on debt which provides the malik with the necessary control he requires to impose on the mazdoor his contract of bondage.

We see here the crucial importance of moneylending and debts as instruments of control today just as much as when capital originally penetrated into agriculture nearly a hundred years ago. And we should add in this context that moneylending is not only the instrument of control over labour but also land as at the end of the 19th century. For as we have seen in our earlier analysis of household budgets it is not only mazdoors but also kisans who are deficit or near deficit. Even the small maliks are in some cases deficit households.<sup>5</sup> And just as capital uses loans to control labour in the case of mazdoors, it uses debts to alienate land from the kisans and smallest maliks. Some evidence of this phenomenon was presented in our analysis of asset distribution and transfers in Chapter-II.

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5. See Chapter-III Sections 1 & 2.

It should be emphasised in this context that the wide-spread incidence of indebtedness across different classes evident in the villages surveyed for this study is in fact a general phenomenon representative of the entire Palamau district. There have been no general surveys of indebtedness in the district in recent years. But the Palamau data of the All India Rural Credit Survey of 1951-52 shows this wide spread of indebtedness. As indicated in table 5.21 the absolute quantum of debts decreases as we move from the big cultivators to the small cultivators but proportion of persons indebted rises. Unfortunately the sample design of the AIRCS classified cultivators according to decile groups and not asset base or wealth-income categories. Hence it is not possible to differentiate the really big land owners from small maliks. Thus the class of Big Cultivators in the table may include very large land-owners along with small maliks who are also deficit and so on. Similarly the category of all non-cultivators lumps together agricultural labour with professional traders, moneylenders etc. Hence it is not possible to identify from the table the specific differences between different economic classes regarding indebtedness. Nevertheless the widespread incidence of indebtedness is quite evident.



TABLE - 5.21

CURRENT BORROWINGS, INDEBTEDNESS AND OUTSTANDING  
DUES PER FAMILY AND PROPORTION OF FAMILIES IN  
PALAMAU, 1951-52

	Borrowings		Indebtedness		Outstanding Dues	
	Proportion	Amount	Proportion	Amount	Proportion	Amount
Big Cultivator	51.1	435	69.6	593	12.1	468
Large Cultivator	58.1	342	64.6	470	14.4	188
Medium Cultivator	70.1	146	74.7	216	6.7	23
Small Cultivator	86.3	97	91.1	157	2.2	42
All Cultivator	71.4	177	76.8	260	7.7	120
All Non-Cultivator	66.8	59	77.7	81	-	-
All families	70.5	154	77.0	223	6.2	120

Source: All India Rural Credit Survey, General Report, tables 10, 13 & 15. Proportion indicates the percentage of sampled households in the size group concerned.



2.1 Asset Base of Bonded Labour  
(Sevakias) and Indebtedness

In the context of the direct relationship between deficit household budgets, indebtedness and the compulsion to bondage it is important to assert that the bonded labourer, or Sevakia as he is known in Palamau, does not belong to any separate or distinct class apart from the mazdoors. This is best established by a comparison of the asset base of mazdoors in general with that of Sevakias. As indicated in table 5.22 the 'free' mazdoor is by no means better off than the Sevakia. In Chatti the average land holding of both groups is about a quarter of an acre while neither group owns any bullocks. In Daho 'free' mazdoors own over two and a half acres on the average and a marginal number of bullocks in comparison to only about half an acre and no bullocks for Sevakias. But in Jori it is the Sevakias who own over eight acres of land per family as compared to about five acres in the case of mazdoors, and both own a marginal number of bullocks. For Shripalpur we have already seen that there are only a few Harijan families here, all of whom have been bonded. Thus on the whole the evidence does not suggest that the 'mazdoors' are a distinctly better off strata of agricultural labourers compared to

TABLE - 5.22

AVERAGE ASSET BASE OF MAZDOOR &  
SEVAKIA HOUSEHOLDS IN PALAMAU

	Average size of Ownership holdings				Average Number of Bullocks owned			
	Chatti	Daho	Jori	Shripal- pur	Chatti	Daho	Jori	Shripalpur
Mazdoors	0.28	2.65	4.96	-	Nil	0.09	0.76	-
Sevakias	0.24	0.51	8.36	1.01	Nil	-	0.33	-

the Sevakias. In fact we have seen that the entire class of mazdoors are a chronically deficit class and any of them can at any time become bonded depending on his specific circumstances. In short a sevakia is like class of any other member of the mazdoors and the problem of bondage is really a problem of the entire class of agricultural labourers. It is merely a matter of chance that some of them have already fallen into bondage while others have not. This has far reaching policy implications for it implies that any genuine long term solution to the problem of bonded labour must cover the entire class of agricultural labourers as a whole, and not only those already in bondage, as the target group of the policy.

Apart from the free and bonded labourers covered within our complete enumeration survey of four villages, data was also collected separately for a small sample of sixty bonded labourers selected from some twenty five different villages spread across the district. The extent of indebtedness compared against the size of their asset bases is presented in table 5.53. It will be evident from the table <sup>that</sup> while there are 5% cases where the asset base is 5 acres or more (average 10.83 acres) among the sampled bonded labourers, in as much as 61.67% of the cases the bonded labourer is entirely landless.

TABLE - 5.33

ASSET BASE AND INDEBTEDNESS OF BONDED LABOUR

Amount of Loan	Rs. 50 or less	Rs. 51-100	Rs. 101-300	More than Rs. 300	Total
Land Owned					
Landless (0 acres)	5	8	20	4	37 (61.67)
0-2 acres (1.26)	1	5	7	1	14 (23.33)
2-5 acres (3.42)	1	4	1	-	6 (10.00)
More than 5 acres (10.83)	2	-	1	-	3 (5.00)
Total	9 (15.00)	17 (28.33)	29 (48.33)	5 (8.33)	60 (100.00)
Average Debt	Rs. 33.83	Rs. 76.01	Rs. 175.89	Rs. 170.00	R

Note: Figures in parenthesis give percentage of column totals or row totals to the total size of the sample except in column 1 where the figures in parenthesis give average holding size.

Altogether 85% of the bonded labour households have assets of 2 acres or less. This coupled with our earlier evidence that kisans or even maliks were deficit households where there land base was very small, immediately points towards weak land base as being a principal source of deficits, indebtedness and, where mazdoors are concerned, bondage.

This association between asset base and indebtedness is also confirmed by the distribution of bonded labourers within a land holding size group by size of debt. It will be evident from the table that a relatively larger proportion of bonded labour households in the 'land less' or 'less than 2 acres' size groups have debts of Rs.100 or more as compared to bonded labour households with a larger land base i.e. the size of debt per bonded labour family varies inversely with the size of their land base.

Finally in terms of the absolute size of debt nearly half of the sampled cases (48.33%) have debts of between Rs.100 to Rs.300 (average 175.89) another 28.33% have debts of Rs.51 to Rs.100 (average 76.01) and 15% have debts of Rs.50 or less (average 33.83). Only 8.33% have debts of more than Rs.300 (average 470.00). Thus the absolute size of debt per family

is not really very large. But in a relative sense we know that these debts are indeed very heavy compared to the extremely low levels of income of the mazdoor households. And they cannot possibly hope to relieve themselves of these debts as they are deficit inspite of already being at the subsistence level of consumption.

## 2.2 Social Status of Bonded Labour

The social status of bonded labourers in terms of caste is represented in table 5.24. It is interesting to note that tribal labourers (including those converted to Christianity) constitute about 25% of the total sample of bonded labourers. In contrast nearly half of the total sample, are Bhuiyas - one of the lower Harijan castes which also accounts for the bulk of agricultural labour in the district. This evidence is interesting as a counter example in the light of frequent suggestions that the tribal folk by virtue of their greater simplicity are somehow more prone to getting caught in the debt-bondage trap.

## 2.3 Purpose of Loans Among the Bondage

While we have already analysed in some detail the general situation of low incomes, low land base and deficit household budgets which forces indebted-



TABLE - 5.24

CASTE DISTRIBUTION OF BONDED LABOUR

Amount of Loan Caste	Rs. 50 or less	Rs. 51-100	Rs. 101-300	More than Rs. 300	Total
Bhuiya	4	9	12	4	29(48.33)
Dusadh	1	1	5		7(11.67)
Oroan (T)		1			1(1.67)
Nagesia (T)	1	3	2	1	7(11.67)
Munda (T)	1		1		2(3.33)
Lohar	1		1		2(3.33)
Ghasi			2		2(3.33)
Christian	1				1(1.67)
Kahar			1		1(1.67)
Parahia (T)		1	3		4(6.67)
Chamar		1	2		3(5.00)
Ganju		1			1(1.67)
Total	9(15.00)	17(28.33)	29(48.33)	5(8.33)	

Figures in parenthesis show % of row or column totals to total sample. T denotes tribe.

ness and bondage on the mazdoor it is also important from some policy points of view to examine the immediate causes or occasions for taking loans which lead to bondage.

It is ironic to note from table 5.25 that in over 60% of the cases studied the immediate cause of taking loans leading to bondage is expenditure on marriage! The households being deficit even under normal conditions, any additional expenditure drives them into indebtedness. And an event like marriage is ideal. Among the Bhuiyas and tribals, who constitute the large bulk of bonded labour in Palamau, this event is sufficiently important to incur large expenses even if at the cost of life long bondage. Social mores and customs among them require a certain minimum of festive expenditure to mark the occasion. Simply a marriage ritual without expenditure is not socially accepted. And so it is that on the very day that he begins to share a new life of love and companionship with his wife the newly married mazdoor or his father also enters a life of bondage and misery.

The next important purpose for which loans of bondage are taken is normal consumption. Over 16% of the cases of bondage had started for this reason, along with another 11% or so which started with loans to meet

TABLE - 5.25

PURPOSE OF LOANS AMONG BONDED LABOUR

Amount purpose	50 or less	51-100	101-300	More than 300	Total
Marriage	3	9	22	4	38(63.33)
Business & Medical treatment	1	3	3	-	7(11.67)
General & Adh	1	2	2	-	5(8.33)
Personal consumption	4	3	2	1	10(16.67)
Total	9 (15.00)	17 (28.33)	29(48.33)	5(8.33)	60(100.00)

Figures in Parenthesis denote % of row or column totals

expenses on illness and medical treatment which may be treated as a related category. The remaining 8% or so fell into debt-bondage to meet the expenses of funeral and shradh ceremonies - also considered essential for the well being of the departed soul. In short around 80% of the surveyed cases of bondage started with debts incurred to meet the expenses of marriage and death.

Clearly social education aimed at reducing non-essential expenses in such ceremonies would help mitigate the situation of the bonded somewhat. However it is important not to overplay the role of this factor. Ceremonies, especially marriage ceremonies, entail large expenditure and therefore large debts. Individual loans for marriage tend to be larger for instance than the individual loans generally taken for consumption - labourers bonded for the latter reason tending to be concentrated in smaller debt size-groups. They are thus simply the easier bait to use from the maliks' point of view to 'catch' a bonded labourer. But we should have no illusions that the reduction of ceremonial expenditure alone may eliminate bondage. So long as agriculture remains backward and labour households chronically deficit bondage will remain.

#### 2.4 Period of Bondage

Finally, while looking at the specific situation of bonded labourers it is important to look at the length of time for which the more unfortunate mazdoors have remained bonded. Out of the surveyed cases nearly 40% had been bonded for a period of between 3 to 5 years (table 5.26). Another 20% had been bonded for a period of two years or less. Thus in nearly 60% of the surveyed cases the mazdoors had got into bondage relatively recently i.e. within the preceding five years. However there were also over 18% of the surveyed cases who had been in bondage for between ten to fifteen years and 10% cases where the period of bondage was over 15 years. In fact the average period of bondage reported by this last sub-group works out to around 25 years (table 5.26).

The period of bondage clearly varies with age. It is difficult to produce data for this because the bonded labourer is generally illiterate, has little use or opportunity for planning his life, and therefore has only the vaguest notion about his age. However it was quite obvious while meeting the bonded labourers at the time of the survey that generally speaking those who were bonded for long periods were the older mazdoors. In short a man usually gets bonded at an early age - often the day of his marriage as we have seen - and his

TABLE - 5.26

DISTRIBUTION OF BONDED LABOUR BY PERIOD OF BONDAGE

Period of Bondage	Amount of Loan	50 or less	51-100	101-300	More than 300	Total
2 years or less (1.5)		1	4	6	1	12 (20.00)
3-5 years (3.65)		7	5	9	2	23 (38.38)
6-9 years (6.38)		-	3	4	1	8 (13.33)
10-15 years (11.45)		-	3	8	-	11 (18.33)
Over 15 years (24.5)		1	2	2	1	6 (10.00)
Total		9 (15.00)	17 (28.33)	29 (48.33)	5 (8.33)	60 (100.00)

Figures in parenthesis in the first column indicate average years of  
bondage for the group. In the last column and row these are % of  
row and column totals respectively.



years in bondage simply increase as he grows older. Very few cases were noted where a bonded labourer had been able to free himself by paying off his 'debt!.

### 3. THE MALIKS OF BONDED LABOUR

#### 3.1 Landholding and Caste

So far we have examined the existing structure of bondage from the point of view of the mazdoors. Who become bonded? What are the compulsions? The immediate causes? The size of loans, period of bondage etc.<sup>6</sup> We now turn to the reverse aspect of the phenomenon i.e. the maliks who hold bonded labour. What sort of maliks hold bonded labour in Palamau and why?

The evidence on landholding and caste of these maliks has been presented in table 5.31 below. Among the sampled cases of bonded labour we find that 18.6% of the maliks own 10 acres of land or less (average 5.19 acres). Another 14% own between 10.20 acres (average 12.00 acres). The largest proportion of maliks holding bonded labour (32.56% belong to the 20-50 acres holding-size group (average 24.62 acres). The second largest proportion of such maliks (23.36%) belong to

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6. Apart from the statistical data it is also important to understand how a bondage contract actually comes up and operates in real life. For this purpose some illustrative case studies have been included in Appendix-A.

TABLE - 5.31  
MALIKS OF BONDED LABOUR  
LAND HOLDING AND CASTE

Caste	Size of Holding					Total
	10 acres	10-20	20-50	50-100	100 acres	
Brahmin	2	-	4	6	2	14 (32.56)
Rajput	-	1	4		1	6 (13.95)
Baniya	4	3	5	4	1	17 (39.53)
Oroan		1				1 (2.33)
Muslim	1				1	2 (4.65)
Gwala	1	1				2 (4.65)
Halwai			1			1 (2.33)
Total	8 (18.60)	6 (13.95)	14 (32.56)	10 (23.26)	5 (11.63)	43 (100.00)
Average holding size	5.19 acres	12.00	24.62	68.89	170.00	

Figures in parenthesis indicate percentage of row or column totals.

the 50-100 acres holding size group (average 68.89 acres). And finally another 11.63% of the maliks are the really large landlords, rare in Palamau, who own 100 acres of land or more (average 170 acres).

Thus even though the really large landlord is usually quite rare in Palamau, it is evident that generally it is the bigger land owners of the area who hold - or are able to hold - bonded labour. Nevertheless there is still a substantial proportion of nearly twenty per cent of bonded labour maliks who own less than ten acres. We have seen from our earlier analysis of malik households of the selected villages in Chapter-III that generally the malik households owning 10 acres or less just about break-even or are even deficit households (see table 3.24). Hence it is interesting to ask how even these households, without any surplus at all, are able to operate the loans - indebtedness - bondage relationship. As we shall see subsequently the pay off on such loans leading to bondage are very high and make it well worth their while to set money aside for it in spite of their own tight resource positions. Indeed it is even more important for them to use bonded labour than the larger land owners with a less tight resource position. And the only reason why a relatively small share of bonded labourers are held by them is simply

that their resource position does not allow them to hold more.

A second interesting feature of the maliks of bonded labour is their caste distribution. It will be noted from table 5.31 that nearly 40% of these maliks are Baniyas, a caste traditionally specialising in merchant and moneylending activities. This is further evidence of a fact we have already noted earlier, namely the crucial role of moneylending and indebtedness in the relationship of bondage. In terms of relative size among the maliks of bonded labour, the Baniya caste is followed by the Brahmins (32.56%) and Rajputs (13.95%). These maliks are really the modern descendents of the old Hindu Jagirdars.<sup>7</sup> Along with the baniyas it was these two castes which began controlling labour through bondage when the system originally developed at the end of the 19th century. The remaining 14% or so of the maliks of bonded labour come from among the Halwai's, Gwalas, Muslims and even the occasional Oraon tribal.

### 3.2 Size of Holding and Employment of Bonded Labour

Apart from their holding size and caste it is also important to examine the relationship between the amount of land the malik holds and the number of bonded labourers he employs.

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7. See Chapter-I, part 2.

Generally the absolute number of bonded labourers held increases with the size of holding and this is to be expected. But what is interesting is that the number of bonded labourers does not rise in proportion to the size of holding (table 5.32). Relative to the size of holding, the number of bonded labourers employed actually goes down. This is demonstrated in table 5.32. In other words the intensity of bonded labour use increases, as the size of holding decreases. In fact in the smallest size group of 'less than two acres' even the absolute number of bonded labourers employed per malik household is actually more than in the next higher category.

Thus the need, or dependence, on employing bonded labour seems to be more for the smaller maliks though their weaker resource position evidently makes it more difficult for them to do so. This inference seems to be correct because we shall argue immediately below that the motivation for holding labour in bondage is primarily to squeeze greater absolute surplus out of them than when they are free. Clearly the weaker the position of the malik the greater is his need, but not necessarily his capacity, to physically squeeze out as much surplus product as possible from his labourer.

TABLE - 5.32

BONDED LABOUR HELD BY MALIKS

Holding Size Group	Average Number of Bonded Labourers Held	Number of acres per Bonded Labourer
<10 acres (5.19)	2.29	2.27
10-20 (12.00)	1.83	6.56
20-50 (24.62)	2.92	8.43
50-100 (68.89)	5.40	12.76
>100 acres (170.00)	16.20	10.49

Figures in parenthesis denote average holding size of each size group.



### 3.3 Motivations for Holding Labour in Bondage

Finally we can turn to what is perhaps the most significant aspect of the phenomenon of bondage both analytically as well as from the point of view of formulating policy. Namely the advantage of the malik or his motivation in perpetuating the system.

It will be noted from the comparison of average wage rates and hours of work in table 5.33 below that on the average a Sevakia (bonded labourer) is paid about 300 gms. of grain less in his daily wage as compared to the free labourer.

TABLE - 5.33

WAGE RATES, HOURS AND DAYS OF EMPLOYMENT  
AVERAGE FOR SELECTED VILLAGES

	Daily Wage Rate(Grain)	Daily Hours of work	Hourly Wage Rate	Annual No. of Days Employed
Mazdoors	1.75 Kg.	9.25	0.189 Kg.	182
Sevakias	1.45 Kg.	11.22	0.129 Kg.	239

At the same time he is putting in about two hours of extra labour. When both factors are taken into account the hourly wage rate of the bonded labourer works out to only 129 gms. This is 60 gms. or around 33% less than the hourly wage rate of 189 gms. for the free mazdoors.

This 33% saving of wage cost per unit of labour time employed is a net saving which the malik enjoys by employing bonded rather than free labour over and above the normal surplus product which he extracts from all labour, whether bonded or free, in any case.

The extremely far reaching implications of this comparison are obvious. It should be emphasised therefore that the results of a small micro-study like the present one do not provide a scientific basis for generalising even for a district, let alone the rest of Bihar or other parts of the country. Such studies, however, often lead to important qualitative insights. Indeed that is precisely their purpose. And the evidence presented above that employing bonded labour rather than free labour implies a saving of about 33% for the malik should also be interpreted only in this perspective.

The evidence confirms our formulation, presented earlier in Chapter-IV, that essentially bondage is a specific form of the 'formal subsumption of labour under capital' typical of the kind of archaic or backward capitalist relations prevalent in Palamau's agriculture. Under this relationship the surplus product of labour is extracted by maximising not relative surplus but absolute surplus. It is extracted not by

raising the productivity per unit of labour time through investment in physical capital but mainly by minimising the necessary product (wage rate) and maximising the length of the working day.

Thus, with a saving of 60 gms. of grain wage per hour of labour the malik saves a total of 673.20 gms. in a bonded labourer's average working day of 11.22 hours. Since the average number of days for which such labour is employed works out to about 239 days in the year (see table 5.33), the average annual saving to the malik works out to as much as 160 kilograms of grain.<sup>8</sup>

The above account needs to<sup>be</sup> supplemented in terms of a whole range of questions which now open up. For if our analysis is correct then the malik's employment of bonded labour is evidently based on some clear economic calculations - or profit considerations if we prefer. Firstly, if indeed it is more profitable to employ bonded

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8. It should be pointed out here that apart from the daily grain wage which has been taken into account here, a Sevakia in Palamau is also sometimes given Palhat land of about 0.19 acres for his own cultivation during the period of his bondage. This is not given to the free mazdoor. Strictly speaking the produce of this 0.19 acres should be deducted in our reckoning where ever applicable. However given the extremely low productivity on mazdoor lands (see table 3.33) above, the produce of 0.19 acres palhat land would not in any way alter the qualitative implication of our results. Consequently we have avoided the necessary quantitative adjustments to take account of palhat in our reckoning.

labour rather than free labour than why would the malik employ any free labour at all? The answer is that the number of bonded labourers which a malik can profitable employ is constrained on the one hand by the minimum size of loans for which he can 'catch' a bonded labourer and on the other by the number of days for which he actually needs to employ him.

The mazdoor is not under any illusions about the extremely harsh conditions of labour under bondage or about the difficulty of getting out of bondage once he is in it. Hence he would not let himself into bondage for loans smaller than sum minimum amount as warranted by his individual circumstances - especially if he has a negligible asset base and therefore very little likelihood of getting out of bondage. We have already seen earlier that nearly seventy per cent of the bonded labourers interviewed had got into bondage on the occasion of a major family event such as marriage or shradh, the high expenses for which they felt they could not avoid (see table 5.25). We have also seen that nearly 60% of them had got bonded against loans worth Rs.100 or more. Which, for the extremely poor mazdoors of Palamau, is indeed a large sum. Thus there are limits to the minimum amount of loan for which a malik is generally able to hold a bonded labourer.

Along with this the malik will also assess how many labourers he actually needs to employ throughout the year, not only in peak season but also through most of the off season. We have seen in table 5.33 that compared to the free mazdoor, who is employed for about 182 days on the average, including off farm employment, the bonded labourer is employed for about 239 days during the year. There are a few, and only a few, labourers for whom the maliks have work on the farm or off farm for a greater part of the year. And they would find it advantageous to hold only that many persons as bonded labour. Naturally exactly how many would vary depending on the size of his holdings, non-farm operation etc. This is why we have seen that the number of bonded labourers held varies by and large with the holding size of the malik (table 5.32). This is also why we pointed out above that while the smaller malik may find it relatively more important to hold bonded labour, whom he exploits more intensively than the free labourer, his capacity to hold bonded labour is obviously restricted by his resource base.

Apart from the principal motivation of the malik discussed above, a subsidiary motive which maliks and the sevakias themselves refer to is the timely availability of labour. Where agriculture is so heavily dependent



the distribution of rainfall - which itself is scanty and erratic - the delay of even a few days in certain operations can mean substantial productivity losses e.g. sowing immediately after the rain and the round of ploughing which should immediately precede the sowing. For this purpose having some assured labour available always at a moments notice is an added advantage.<sup>9</sup>

Finally if bondage is primarily a means of extracting maximum absolute surplus from labour under conditions of low labour productivity a question arises as to why the malik does not invest in raising labour productivity and hence his rate of relative surplus? Partly the answer lies here in simply the non-availability of investable surplus. We have seen for instance that maliks owning around ten acres or less generally do not have any investable surplus left over after meeting their own consumption requirement (table 3.24). Over 80% of the bonded labourers interviewed were of course bonded to maliks owning more land - most of them very much more (table 5.31) - who would also be having surpluses. But the size of the surplus is also important. Incremental additions to expenditure are unlikely to alter the situation radically in favour of relative surplus as opposed to absolute surplus as the principal basis of extracting surplus product. To really make it paying to use high doses of chemical fertiliser,

9. For a similar point in relation to attached labour in Kuttanad district of Kerala, See A.V. Jose - The Origin of Trade Unions among the Agricultural Labourers in Kerala. Social Scientist off print.



for instance, the malik would also need assured water supply which implies investment in irrigation - except where this is already provided by the state. Hence under conditions of a generally backward material-technical basis of agriculture even these bigger maliks, who are not by any means comparable to the great landlords of north Bihar, may individually lack adequate investable surpluses to permit such a shift to high labour productivity.

A more important explanation however is perhaps the alternative uses of this surplus which may be more paying than developing the productive forces of agriculture as such. This could be in trade, moneylending, transport and a whole host of activities other than agricultural production. Unfortunately the necessary data for comparing the alternative rates of return in these different activities is not available. Nevertheless the point is well illustrated by the returns from holding bonded labour itself which we have calculated below.

As we have mentioned earlier, in Palamau no interest is overtly charged on loans against bondage of labour. However the savings in terms of lower cost per unit of labour time of bonded labour is itself a very high return against these loans. Since these

savings are over and above the surplus normally extracted from free labour, and since they arise purely from the relationship of bondage, these additional surpluses from employing bonded rather than free labour are essentially the returns which the malik reaps on his loan. And as indicated in the table below, the rates of return for this particular deployment of the maliks capital is generally extremely high.

We have already seen earlier that on an average the bonded labourer is employed for about 239 days in the year. During this period the malik is able to extract from him a net additional surplus, over and above the normal surplus, of about 160 kilograms of grain on the average. Since the surplus exacted is the maximum, the bonded labourer being already at the bare subsistence level, this absolute annual return is more or less fixed and invariant with the size of loan. Hence smaller the size of loan the higher the rate of return. Moreover, weather fluctuations and other disturbances apart, the same return accrues year after year to the malik. The aggregate return thus increases every year by the same absolute quantity of about 160 kilograms without any additional cost so long as the original loan is unpaid. Hence the rate of return also increases, though at a decreasing rate.

This is made clearer when expressed in terms of the following algebraic rule

$$r = \frac{1}{nL} (n.K - L) \cdot 100$$

where  $r$  is the average annual rate of return,  $L$  is the original loan,  $n$  the number of years of bondage and  $K$  the constant absolute amount of net additional return per annum per bonded labour which we have seen to be about 160 kgs. in our case. It is evident from this expression that  $r$  decreases as  $L$  increases and  $r$  increases as  $n$  increases, though at a decreasing rate. Thus the malik would be interested in securing a bonded labourer for as small a loan as possible and retaining him in bondage for as long as possible. The actual rates of return corresponding to different sizes of loans and for different periods of bondage have been calculated in table 5.34.

For each of the four size groups of loans we have calculated the average loan. This loan which is usually in cash has then been converted into a grain equivalent, using the weighted average price of different grains, to compare it with the additional surplus (grain wages not paid). The corresponding annual rates of return for different periods of bondage upto ten years have been presented in the table for illustrative purposes.

TABLE - 5.34

RATES OF RETURN ON DEBT-BONDAGE LOANS

Size class of Loan	Rs. 50 or less	Rs. 51-Rs. 100	Rs. 101-Rs. 300	Over Rs. 300
Proportion of Bonded Labourers in the class	15%	28.33%	48.33%	10.00%
Average amount of loan in the class	Rs. 33.83	Rs. 76.01	Rs. 175.89	Rs. 470.00
Grain Equivalent of Average Loan	26.27 kg.	59.04 kg.	136.61 kg.	365.05 kg.
Years of Bondage	Annual Rates of Return (Percentage)			
1	509.06	171.00	17.12	- 56.17
2	559.06	221.00	67.12	- 6.17
3	575.73	237.67	83.79	10.50
4	584.06	246.00	92.12	18.83
5	589.06	251.00	97.12	23.83
6	592.39	254.34	100.46	27.16
7	594.77	256.72	102.84	29.54
8	596.56	258.50	104.62	31.33
9	597.95	259.89	106.01	32.72
10	599.06	261.00	107.12	33.83

It will be noted that for 15% of the cases, where the loans taken were about Rs.33.83 on the average, even in the first year the malik gets back a return of over 500%! By the tenth year the annual rate of return goes upto 600%. For the next class, comprising of 28.33% of the interviewed cases with an average loan of about Rs.76.01, the return in the first year is 171%. By the tenth year the annual rate of return goes up to over 260%. As against this for the 10% of interviewed cases with an average loan of Rs.470.00 the initial loan is not recovered in the first two years. But by the third year there is an average annual rate of return of 10.5%. And by the tenth year this goes up to nearly 34%. For the modal class which covers 48.33% of the interviewed cases, with average loans of Rs.175.89, the rate of return in the first year is 17.12%. By the tenth year this goes up to 107.12%. And it is interesting to recall in this context that in nearly 30% of the interviewed cases the mazdoors had already been bonded for over ten years at the time of interview.

Thus by almost any standards of profit calculation, extending loans to hold labour in bondage is indeed an extremely lucrative avenue for the malik to deploy his capital. And economically it may be perfectly



rational for him to opt for this in preference to productive investment on the material technical development of his agriculture.

Nevertheless a question still remains, from the maliks point of view, about the security of such deployment of his moneys towards holding labour in bondage. After all the estimated high returns are only real returns provided the labourer in question adheres to the harsh, exploitative terms of the contract. What prevents him from refusing to adhere to it when it is as clear as day light that he has repaid his debt, in some cases several times over, in the very first year of his bondage or at most in the first two or three years?

First of all it must be recognised that in the hopelessly unequal power relations of the village there is no way in which the bonded labourer can deny the malik his contract short of running away from the village. In fact this is known to happen sometimes. But the possibilities and predictable advantages of such 'desertion' are severely limited. Secondly, one has to keep in mind the unimaginable sense of ethics and justice which prevails among these tribes and Harijan castes from among whom the labourers come. The loans taken by them are at times of extreme need. The malik, after all, has come to their rescue at a time when they needed help. Hence,



iniquitous as the conditions of the loan may be, they would generally honour it to the letter. But these power relations and sense of ethics apart, we must remember that bondage also implies a much larger number of days of assured employment compared to the free labourer. Admittedly it is employment at only about  $\frac{2}{3}$  the real wage of the free labourer, but it is all the same an assurance of employment for a much longer portion of the year. Under the archaic and harsh circumstances of Palamau a bonded labourers' freedom, were he to break the contract, may well mean no more than the freedom to starve. And for the experienced maliks this is really their most valued security.

## CHAPTER - VI

### TOWARDS A REHABILITATION POLICY

#### 1. THE PRESENT STRATEGY

In the preceding chapters we have attempted to locate the phenomenon of bondage within the total structure of agrarian relations, analyse its origins and examine why the system still persists. On the basis of this analysis it is now possible to evaluate the experience gathered so far in attempts to curb the system, identify areas where the present strategy might be further consolidated and thus move towards a comprehensive policy. The attempts made so far to control and eliminate the incidence of bonded labour may be broadly classified into three distinct though related aspects i.e. legislation, economic rehabilitation and political mobilisation. An account of each of these three aspects of current policy is given below.

##### 1.1 Legislation

Legislation against the system of bonded labour is not new. Already with Act V of 1843 the colonial government had initiated legal attacks against slavery and bondage in the Madras Presidency.<sup>1</sup> In the province

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1. See Dharma Kumar - Land & Caste in South India: Agricultural Labour in the Madras Presidency during the 19th Century, Cambridge University Press, 1965, Chapter-V.

of Bihar itself we have seen that a Bihar and Orissa Kamiuti Agreement Act was passed in 1920 to control the spread of debt bondage. More recently action has been taken on a countrywide basis by the Central Government. The Bonded Labour System (Abolition) Ordinance was passed on October 24th, 1975. This was later replaced by the Bonded Labour System (Abolition) Act of February 9, 1976.

The detailed provisions of this act have been reproduced in Appendix-B. Here it is sufficient to highlight only the main features of the Act.

(a) The act has defined bonded labour as any labour or service rendered under the Bonded Labour System. The system itself is defined as a system of forced, or partly forced, labour under which a debtor enters, or is presumed to have entered, into an agreement with a creditor that in consideration of advances obtained by him, or his lineal ascendants or descendants, or some similar consideration he would: (i) commit himself, or members of his family or dependents, to do labour for the creditor for a specified or unspecified period and with or without wages, or (ii) forfeit the freedom of employment or other means of livelihood for a specified or unspecified period, or (iii) forfeit

the right to move freely in the country, or (iv) forfeit the right to appropriate or sell any of his property or the product of his labour or the labour of any member of his family or dependents at the market value.

(b) Since such agreements may be either written or even oral the act has also identified by name over thirty different systems of labour, including the Kamia or Sevakia systems found in Palamau, the operation of which may be taken as sufficient to presume that such an agreement exists between debtor and creditor.

(c) The act abolished all such agreements, including those already in existence, and also abolished any existing or future liabilities of repaying a bonded debt.

(d) The act also identifies the District Magistrate as the implementing authority, requires him or the officer specified by him to identify cases of such bonded labour in his jurisdiction, take action to eradicate it and work for the welfare of freed bonded labour.

(e) The act also provides for the appointment of vigilance committees to aid the implementation of the act and spells out the nature of punishment and procedures of trial for offences under the act which are defined as cognizable and bailable offences.

Implementation in Palamau

Under the provisions of this act a total of 613 bonded labourers had been identified and freed in Palamau district according to official evidence at the time of our survey (say around October, 1977). It should be mentioned in this context that Palamau district is generally recognised as one of the more successful districts in the drive against bonded labour. As such the fact of only 613 bonded labourers being freed even in a successful district like Palamau is indicative of the difficulties involved in implementing the act.

According to the administrators concerned, both in Palamau and elsewhere, the difficulties are mainly of two types. On the one hand, even though the act recognises oral agreements of bondage as cognizable offences it is difficult to establish the operation of such an agreement legally even though it is known to operate in practice. On the other hand the bonded labourers themselves are hesitant to come and identify themselves before the authorities in fear of reprisals from their maliks. Hence unless the District Magistrate or the officer concerned makes a special effort bonded labourers do not get easily identified.



It is generally recognised therefore that in spite of the exhaustive and specific provisions of the act, legislation by itself will remain a dead letter, as it has in this and related matters in the past, unless it is backed up by measures to transform the real condition of existence of the labourers and the economic pressures which operate on them.

#### 1.2 Economic Rehabilitation

It is in fact as a back up measure to support the legal intervention that some attempts have also been made to rehabilitate the freed bonded labourers economically.

Initially this task was left to the states. It was executed, with greater or lesser degrees of success in different areas, by the district collectors themselves while the central government encouraged such programmes and helped to mount them. Recently however the central Ministry of Labour has itself developed and sponsored a scheme for the rehabilitation of freed bonded labour.

Following approval by the Planning Commission of a centrally sponsored scheme for rehabilitation of bonded labour, and the provision of Rs.1 crore for the same in the budget of the central Ministry of Labour



for 1978-79, the Ministry has now issued guidelines to the different state governments and union territories for formulation of specific schemes on a matching grant basis.<sup>2</sup>

The guidelines provide for three types of schemes. (a) First there are land based schemes which involve the identification of surplus land, their allotment to freed bonded labourers, preferably in the villages where they reside, and finally the delivery of input packages such as credit, seed, fertilisers, draught animals, implements etc. and land reclamation where necessary. (b) Secondly there are schemes of distributing livestock such as milch cattle, goats, pigs, etc. for supplementing labourers' incomes along with marketing and veterinary cover for the same. (c) The last category includes skill based schemes for identifying and organising production based on specific skills or crafts in local areas; arranging inputs, capital etc. and also organising the necessary marketing channels for these products.

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2. See order no.Y11011(1)78-AL, Government of India, Ministry of Labour, dated May 30, 1978. Subject: Centrally Sponsored Scheme for Rehabilitation of Bonded Labour (1978-79). This has been reproduced below in Appendix-C.

The scheme was supposed to be launched by the end of June and accordingly the Central Labour Ministry set up a screening committee on June 20, 1978 to monitor the progress of the scheme. As a further follow up measure the Ministry of Labour has very recently issued orders relaxing the age limit and giving special priority to freed bonded labourers for appointment to central government posts of category C & D through the employment exchange. It has also requested the state governments and public sector undertakings to adopt these provisions.<sup>3</sup>

Since the Centrally Sponsored Scheme and the follow up provision for priority in Government Employment have only just been initiated, it is still too early to evaluate the impact of these schemes. Furthermore since the centrally sponsored scheme has a budget provision of only Rs.1 crore on a matching grant basis, even if the grants are fully utilised by the states this still implies a total expenditure on the scheme of only Rs.2 crores for the whole country! Clearly therefore the scheme cannot be regarded at this stage as any thing more than an experimental scheme.

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3. See order no.S-11011(5)/78-AL(BL), Government of India, Ministry of Labour, dated August 19, 1978.

However there is already a considerable volume of experience gathered from similar schemes initiated by the states themselves and it is possible in the light of these experiences, to strengthen the centrally sponsored scheme for 1978-79 and move on to a more comprehensive and larger rehabilitation programme in subsequent years.

#### Implementation in Palamau

Following the identification and release of 613 bonded labourers in Palamau district, the district administration followed this up with a programme of economic rehabilitation. Within the district the programme was given greatest emphasis in Ranka block - in particular the three villages of Ramkanda, Daho and Raksi. The data on performance of the programme in this block is given in table-6.11.

It will be noticed that even though the programme has been given much emphasis in this block a total of only 75 families of freed bonded labourers could be given assistance in the entire block - most of the families being concentrated in the three villages mentioned above. Insofar as these 75 families are concerned there is no disputing the fact that each family has gained a substantial resource package which has considerably augmented their resource

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TABLE - 6.11

RESOURCE PACKAGE DISTRIBUTED IN RANKA BLOCK

	Land	Bullocks	Implements*	Seeds	Fertilisers	Goats
No. of families covered	75	75	75	75	75	74
Amount per family	2 <sup>+</sup>	2	5 to 9 items	10 kg.	40 kg.	3 or 4
Total Distribution	147.50 acres	150	509 units	750 kg.	3000 kg.	234

\* These include - Far, Hasua, Gaita, Kudal, Tangi, Khurpi, Rassi, Kundi & Balti.

+ One family has not been given land and one family has been given 1.5 acres only.

endowment. Each family has been given about 2 acres of surplus government land. In addition they have also got a pair of bullocks, 10 kilograms of seed, 40 kilograms of fertilisers and a basic stock of implements for ploughing etc.

A resource package of this order will clearly go a long way in launching each of the aided families onto a path of household farming which may open up an altogether different vista of life for them. But at the same time this is not total rehabilitation since a family cannot become totally self sufficient on the basis of a two acre plot in the conditions obtaining in a forested upland block like Ranka.<sup>4</sup> The families will thus continue to depend on income from outside employment and thus remain dependent on maliks. In some cases this may even result in a gradual erosion of their newly acquired resources and total dependence on the malik once again. And this has happened inspite of concentrating the available resources on just a few families and that also in a block where the effort has been more effective then in other parts of the district.

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4. See for instance the household budget data for Daho village from this block in Chapter-III above.

Thus out of a total distribution of 765 acres of surplus land in the district, Ranka block alone accounts for as much as 147.5 acres; and out of about 400 freed bonded labourers aided with resource packages in the district Ranka block alone accounts for as many as 75 such persons. In other words when we move from the block to the performance of the whole district we find in relative terms an even weaker position. And it is useful to remember in this context that thanks to the special efforts of a series of dedicated collectors and other officers concerned, Palamau is still among the most successful districts in so far as this particular programme is concerned!

The overall achievements of the programme in the district as a whole is summarised in table-6.12 below. Upto the time of the present survey, say around October, 1977, in all about 12 lakhs of rupees worth of resources had been distributed to freed bonded labour in the district in addition the 765.13 acres of government land. These resources were distributed in two parts. One part was financed from central assistance for the Tribal Sub-plan in blocks which came within the sub-plan area. The other part was distributed in the non sub-plan area under the budget of the welfare department.



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TABLE - 6.22

RESOURCE PACKAGE DISTRIBUTED IN PALAMAU DISTRICT

	Land	Bullocks	Implements & Seeds	Goats
Sub-plan Area				
Amount sanctioned/ distributed	-	-	Rs.5,00,000.00*	-
No. of family covered	-	114	114	259
Quantity per family	-	2	N.A.	3 to 4 goats
Non Sub-plan Area				
Amount Sanctioned/ distributed	765.13 acres (G.M. land)	4,33,200.00		2,54,988
No. of families covered	420	278	278	320
Quantity for family	1.83 acres average	N.A.	N.A.	3 to 4 goats
District Total				
Amount Sanctioned/ distributed	765.13 acres		Rs.1,88,188.00	
No. of families covered	420	392	392	579
Quantity per covered family	1.83 acres average	N.A.	N.A.	

\* This includes pigs, poultry etc. also.

In the sub-plan area a total of 114 families were given bullocks, seeds, implements etc. and 259 families were given goats at the rate of three or four goats per family. Some pigs and poultry have also been distributed here but no land. In the non sub-plan area 420 families were given a total of 769.13 acres of land; 278 families were given bullocks, implements, seeds, etc. and 320 families were given sets of three or four goats each. Thus for the district as a whole we find 420 families have been given land, about 1.83 acres per each family that got land; 392 families have been given bullocks, implements, seeds etc. and 579 families have been given goats as a source of supplementary income.

Taking a rough bulk-line picture, we may say that out of the 613 freed bonded labourer's families about 400 have really been given an adequate resource package to move into household farming.<sup>5</sup> The corresponding budget expenditure being around rupees 5 lakhs, we may very roughly estimate a cost of about 3,000 per rehabilitated family in addition to around two acres of land. And even this, as we have seen, provides only partial rehabilitation since it is not enough to make a family self sufficient. They continue to depend on

5. This leaves out the cases where families have been given a few goats only.

income from outside employment and hence remain atleast partly dependent on their maliks. Full rehabilitation would require more land and an even larger expenditure per family.

These statistics, though admittedly rough estimates, are extremely useful for they give us, when projected on a national scale, an idea of the magnitude of land and financial resources which would be required if this strategy were to be seriously implemented to rehabilitate all bonded labour. In the actual state of things, the total financial allocation of the Centre plus States and Union Territories envisaged in the Centrally Sponsored Scheme for Rehabilitation of Bonded Labour in 1978-79 is a mere two crores. And let alone the rehabilitation of all bonded labour, the government has been recently reported to have taken the position that it cannot even afford the cost of a comprehensive census to simply identify and count the number of bonded labourers in the country.

Under these circumstances, the limited scope of the economic rehabilitation strategy is obvious. But it is still important to point out that if we were to rely on this strategy, the magnitude of the resource problem would actually be much much larger than covering

bonded labourers only. For we have seen in our earlier analysis in Chapter-V that bonded labourers are really a part and parcel of the larger class of mazdoors in general who are also prone to indebtedness and bondage in the Palamau type situations. As such it is this larger class which has to be the target group for policy. Rehabilitating only those who are presently bonded would simply amount to removing one set of mazdoors from the debt-bondage trap where they would soon be replaced by another set of mazdoors.

### 1.3 Political Mobilisation

Clearly what is required in addition to attempts at rehabilitating individual families in identified cases of bondage is a more general strategy to support and consolidate the legal attack against the system of bondage itself. It is in this area that an interesting experiment has been attempted by a central organisation, under the general sponsorship and financial support of the central labour ministry, at politically mobilising bonded labourers along with agricultural labour in general.

The expression 'political mobilisation' used here to describe the experiment should not be interpreted here in the narrow sense of active participation in one or another political party. The expression is

used here to describe an attempt at generating a certain self consciousness among the rural poor about their conditions of existence, making them aware of the advantages of mutual cooperation and coordinated action should they attempt to transform these conditions of their existence, and eventually motivating them towards their own self-organisation against bondage and other similar relations of oppression in the countryside.

The method employed in the experiment so far is to bring together a set of mazdoor participants from surrounding villages to short camps of four or five days duration at some place in a district. Once in these camps, the participants are helped through discussions, lectures and specially designed games to articulate the conditions of their existence, analyse it and eventually search for ways and means of transforming it through their cooperative action. Though undertaken by a central organisation under the auspices of the central labour Ministry, the experiments is by its very nature a localised activity undertaken with the help of local district administrations. And if this approach were to be taken up by the government itself, the strategy would probably have to be implemented again through the district administration. But so far the approach

has only remained an experimental one taken up by a central organisation.

#### Implementation in Palamau

One area where the experiment has been tried is Palamau district and one member from the present research team attended some of these camps to observe the results.

In one such camp,<sup>6</sup> which the organisers of the experiment described as one of the most successful camps, the recently freed participants were totally despondent, subdued and servile when they arrived. The sessions of the first day were devoted entirely to help the participants feel at home and open up with each other and the task group which was running the camp. Through games, formal meetings, informal meetings at meal times and breaks, and a cultural programme devised by the participants in the evening, an atmosphere of freedom and friendliness was successfully built up by the end of the day.

This atmosphere made it possible to proceed from the second day on towards a minimum of consciousness building. The second day was devoted mainly to the participants' own articulation of their own circumstances.

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6. For a detailed account of the camp see R.N. Maharaj - Freed Bonded Labour Camp at Palamau, National Labour Institute Bulletin, Vol.2, No.10, 1976.



The conditions of living, the wages and employment they could get, the reasons for getting trapped into bondage, the problems and pressures of their daily lives and so on. This was done in small discussion groups where participants freely shared their ideas and debated with each other. At the end the whole group came together to consolidate their separate discussions.

On the third day the participants went on to the search for solutions. An estimation of their actual consumption needs, what inessential expenses they could curtail, what Government help they could get to be independent of their maliks and so on. This was also done in small groups and later consolidated along with talks by the task group about minimum wage legislation, abolition of rural indebtedness, the Bonded Labour (Abolition) Act and so on.

On the fourth day the idea of self organisation was introduced through the play of specially designed conflict and cooperation games. By the end of the play the participants were beginning to relate the results of the game with their own situation and beginning to focus on the importance of cooperation and self organisation. The discussions now centered around the methods of self organisation and strategies of collective action.

Again flowing out of large and small informal groups, to these discussions extended the fifth day as well.

By the time the participants left there is no doubt that they exuded a certain degree of collective self confidence and a feeling of hope. Also they had started looking at their situation from a very different perspective compared to that with which they had arrived. If the experiment had been sustained or the camps repeated at frequent intervals, especially in their own villages, there is no doubt that the attempts would have had a lasting impact.

As it was the main camp was followed up by only one or two repeat camps, long after the original camp and that also with only a handful of participants. In other words the experiment was not really sustained. And in consequence when we went back to meet some of the participants in their villages in the course of the present study, it was disappointing to see that they were back to their original state of despondence and submissiveness. What is worse these participants, who are also among the four hundred odd freed bonded labourers of the district who had been given resource packages for economic rehabilitation, have developed a peculiar dependence syndrome vis-a-vis the government

administration. Instead of motivating them towards self help, cooperation and self-organisation, the rehabilitation aid along with the camps seems to have created a feeling among the beneficiaries that having freed them from dependence on the maliks, the Government has now taken them under its own wings. A belief that they can now depend on the Government to protect them and look after their interests permanently. However the compulsions of reality being what they are, these illusions were gradually breaking down when we met them.

The above strategy, which we have defined as 'political mobilisation' interpreted in a very broad sense, can really be seen as an intervention directed at transforming a culture. What has been defined by Frere as 'conscientisation'.<sup>7</sup> Seen in this perspective it can be said that the 'political mobilisation' strategy is also being tried out indirectly in Palamau through the instrument of education.

In March 1976 the Welfare Department had sanctioned the sum of Rs.12,610 for opening a residential school for the children of freed bonded labour in Ramkanda village, Ranka block, followed by a second

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7. See Paulo Frere - Pedagogy of the Oppressed, Penguin Education Series, Hammondsworth, U.K., 1972.

sanction of Rs.7,000 in August, 1976. At the time of our survey in the district, the school was fully operational though the long term problems of maintaining the school financially, expanding it to incorporate higher classes and more students, etc. were yet to be sorted out.

An article giving a detailed account of the school, how it is functioning and some of its problems has been included in Appendix-D below. Here it is sufficient to point out that though the school is being run primarily as a welfare measure, its long term potential as an indirect instrument of building up political consciousness among the mazdoors should not be underestimated. However indifferent the quality of education may be, the very fact of literacy and education introduces a sea change in the outlook of these children of bonded labourers. They are exposed to new ideas, concepts and experiences which their parents or grandparents could never have dreamt of. They are imbued with a sense of self respect and self confidence to which the earlier generations of mazdoors had no access. And these children will grow up to form tomorrow's class of agricultural labour.

It is not that there are no problems in this approach. Already serious problems of alienation etc.

are showing up as pointed out by the article in Appendix-D. But such problems notwithstanding, the future implications of this cultural transformation among the new class of rural labour which will emerge in Palamau tomorrow are indeed far reaching. But to be executed with any meaningful degree of success this educational programme would not only have to be sustained but also substantially expanded.

## 2. TOWARDS A COMPREHENSIVE POLICY

The implementation experience reviewed above indicates<sup>a</sup>/number of ways in which these measures can be consolidated and extended towards the formulation of a comprehensive policy.

### 2.1 Consolidation of experiences

In order to do this systematically it is useful to start with a broad framework of policy based on our analysis of the phenomenon of bondage in Chapters-IV & V above. It will be recalled in this context that the bonded labour system was analysed as being essentially an aspect of the particularly archaic structure of relations between labour and capital which operate in Palamau's backward agriculture. Given the underdeveloped material-technical basis of this agriculture and its low productivity, squeezing out the last drop of absolute surplus, as opposed to raising productivity and relative



surplus, becomes the main basis of relations between labour and capital. The system of bonded labour is optimal for the maliks under these circumstances for it enables them to minimise the daily wage and at the same time maximise the length of the working day. Furthermore the maliks are able to impose this relationship on mazdoors because of the dependence of the latter on the former for employment as well as credit to meet even their subsistence level of consumption.

It follows from this analysis that the question of an adequate policy will have to <sup>be</sup> posed in two distinct dimensions of time. The system of bondage is ultimately rooted in the very backwardness of agriculture and agrarian relations. Hence it can be argued that the system will persist so long as agriculture itself is not transformed from low productivity to high productivity and the basis of agrarian relations is not shifted from maximising absolute surplus to maximising relative surplus. This is clearly something that can only happen in the long run. We may say therefore that the problem of bondage can be ultimately tackled only in the long run. And in the long run the required policy is really nothing by the development of agriculture.



But meanwhile, while we still have to tolerate the existence of the system of bonded labour, a number of short term measures can be adopted to atleast minimise or reduce the incidence of bondage. This is all that we can hope to achieve in the short run. And for this purpose the required strategy is obviously to minimise in whatever may possible the dual dependence of mazdoors on maliks. The dependence for employment and the dependence for credit. The existing measures which we have described above actually need to be assessed within this overall policy frame.

From this point of view we have seen already that legislation by itself cannot be very successful unless it is backed up by other effective measures. And individual economic rehabilitation of identified bonded labourers, we have seen, does not constitute such a measure. First of all even with a relief dose of two acres of land and about Rs.3,000 worth of bullocks and other resources a bonded labour family is only partially rehabilitated. It continues to be dependent on the malik for employment and there is no guarantee that it will not have some of its newly acquired resources expropriated or its members relapsing into bondage again.

Secondly the resource cost of rehabilitation being so large, it has not been possible at present to rehabilitate even all those bonded labourers who have been freed. Hence to think in terms of such rehabilitation through relief doses for all bonded labourers is quite unrealistic.

Finally, even if all existing bonded labourers were to be identified and rehabilitated this would still make no dent on the system of bonded labour as such. Basically all mazdoors in Palamau type areas are deficit households prone to bondage. Hence a reactive policy which merely rehabilitates labourers after they have been bonded only clears away one set of labourers to be replaced by another set of labourers in the debt-bondage trap. What is required is obviously a preemptive policy covering a target group of the entire class of mazdoors in Palamau type areas, and directed at preventing them from getting caught in a debt-bondage trap in the first place.

To this end the political mobilisation experiments described earlier, both the camps as well as the school for children of mazdoors, can certainly be useful measures to back up the legal measures that are already there. But to be effective they have to be

implemented much more intensively and also sustained on a much larger scale. Furthermore the impact of these measures can really only be expected to bear fruit in the long run.

## 2.2 The Comprehensive Policy

Thus none of the three types of strategies in the way they have been tried so far offer a means of effectively reducing the dependence of mazdoors on maliks in the short run. However there are two new components in the centrally sponsored scheme for rehabilitation of bonded labour, discussed in section 1.2 above, which are of crucial importance from this point of view i.e. credit and alternative sources of employment.

### (a) Alternative Sources of Credit

Under the first category of Land Based Schemes the guidelines of the programme<sup>8</sup> mentions a delivery system for credit along with other inputs. Credit, loans of either grain or cash, has been identified in our analysis as one of the two main linkages of dependence between mazdoors and maliks. Indeed it is credit which the malik uses directly as his instrument in imposing a bonded labour contract on the mazdoor. We have also seen that the deficit mazdoors households cannot

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8. See the reference in footnote 2 above.

really subsist without these loans. Hence the creation of an alternative source of adequate credit would immediately help to snap one of the two main linkages of dependence with the malik.

Of course to make this measure effective the creation of a special delivery system for credit to agricultural labour would require much greater emphasis than is probably being envisaged under the centrally sponsored rehabilitation scheme. This entire scheme is presently seen in terms of rehabilitation of bonded labourers, only. But we have already seen above that to be successful any policy against the system of bonded labour must cover the entire mazdoor class which is deficit and prone to debt-bondage in Palamau type areas.

Furthermore the scheme mentions credit as only one among several production inputs for which delivery systems are to be identified under the category of land based schemes. In other words credit is seen here only as a production input. However if an alternative credit delivery system is to be identified, or created, which can effectively curtail the loan dependence of mazdoors on maliks then such a system must cater to demands for production loans as well as consumption loans. In fact the evidence presented in Chapter-V and elsewhere in this study very clearly indicates that the large bulk

of loans leading to debt-bondage are in one sense or another consumption loans.

What is being suggested therefore is the creation of an alternative credit delivery system for production loans as well as consumption loans exclusively reserved for agricultural labour. This last aspect of exclusive reservation is of crucial importance. Experience with cooperative societies and other organised sources of credit have shown in the past that whenever the same credit window has been shared between those who are economically strong and those who are economically weak, the large bulk of credit has always gone to the economically strong. This has happened even though their repayment performance is no better, and sometimes worse, than that of the economically weak.

Clearly the creation of this special credit delivery system will not be easy. Apart from complex managerial and administrative problems, the details for which will have to be worked out, there is simply the problem of cost. To be set up on a sufficiently large scale, as it must be if it is to be effective at all, the special credit window would involve the deployment of a large financial outlay. But at the same time it is useful to keep in mind that most of these credit demands will be



for short term loans of small sums of money. The data presented in Chapter-V indicates that 90% of the loans leading to bondage are for sums of less than Rs.300.00. Over 43% of the loans are for sums of Rs.100.00 or less. And the repayment to maliks in the form of wages saved on labour services is made within the first or second year in most cases.<sup>9</sup> To give an idea of the proportions involved if we take a representative figure like Rs.150.00 as the average size of loans then for every bonded labourer being partially rehabilitated today with a resource package costing Rs.3,000.00, in addition to two acres of land we could use the alternative credit system to protect as many as 20 labourers from getting bonded in the first place!

(b) Alternative Sources of Employment

A second important component envisaged in the centrally sponsored scheme which has not been attempted with any tangible results so far is the creation of alternative sources of employment. Apart from credit, employment is the other main linkage of dependence between mazdoors and maliks. In the absence of alternative

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9. See for instance table 5.34 in Chapter-V. Of course in the alternative credit delivery system being suggested here a different form of repayment would have to be worked out unless the credit system is integrated with the alternative employment programme.



sources of employment the mazdoors are forced to turn to maliks for work. The maliks take advantage of this dependence to impose the most exploitative possible terms and conditions for buying their labour, the ultimate in this direction being the contract of bondage. Hence the creation of alternative sources of employment for mazdoors in government programme or programmes sponsored by the government would immediately help to snap the second main linkage of their dependence on maliks.

But once again in order to be effective the scope of this alternative employment programme will have to be expanded considerably beyond what is being probably envisaged in the centrally sponsored scheme. In its third category the scheme proposes to promote skill/craft based occupations through the identification of such skills and crafts in local areas, the arrangement of necessary inputs and capital and the development of suitable marketing channels. This is an extremely imaginative attempt to build up self employment as an alternative to employment by the maliks. In addition the central Labour Ministry has, in its order of August 19, 1978, also sought to give special priority to freed bonded labour for certain categories of Government

employment etc.<sup>10</sup>

However, the scheme as presently conceived restricts its coverage to bonded labour only whereas we have seen that in order to be effective any policy against bonded labour must have as its target group the entire class of mazdoors who are prone to bondage in Palamau type areas. Obviously it is not being suggested that the alternative employment programme should actually employ all the agricultural labour available in a district. What is important however is that the scope of such a programme, whether through self employment or government employment, should be large enough to generate enough additional demand for labour so as to shift market conditions in favour of agricultural labour in the relevant rural labour market.

The specific design and implementation of the programme would probably vary from one state to another. But in designing such a programme it would be useful to draw upon the experiences of the Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme in Maharashtra and the Food for Work experiment in West Bengal. It may also be useful, in terms of administrative efficiency and cost effectiveness, to tie up the alternative employment programme

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10. See footnote 3 above.

with the alternative credit delivery system. This could be done by supplying credit in the form of an advance wage payment through the employment scheme. The loan could then be recovered within say six to twelve months through deduction at source at a fixed minimum rate over the six to twelve month period. The remainder of the daily wage could be made up of a large grain component and a small cash component. Of course the details of exactly how such a scheme could be designed and implemented would have to be worked out.

(c) The Policy Package

A special credit delivery system for production and consumption loans to agricultural labour and a large scale programme of alternative employment for such labour should have priority as the main components of any policy directed at curbing the incidence of bonded labour. It is evident that the ramifications of such a policy extend well beyond the set of labourers who are presently bonded to cover a target group consisting of the class of agricultural labourers as a whole. This is as it should be. For as we have repeatedly emphasised in our analysis, the problem of bonded labour cannot really be dealt with in isolation from the problem of agricultural labour as a whole. Nevertheless

there is no reason why any of the existing schemes of economic rehabilitation or political mobilisation through education should not be retained within the policy package as supports to the main components so long as the necessary resources are made available. In other words the total policy package against bonded labour should include, in the order of priorities indicated, the following measures:

- i) A special credit delivery system for short term production and consumption loans to agricultural labour only.
- ii) A large scale programme of alternative sources of employment or self employment for agricultural labour.
- iii) A programme of literacy and education for the children of agricultural labour along with repeated conscientisation camps for agricultural labour.
- iv) A programme of economic rehabilitation through resource grants to identified bonded labourers in pockets where the incidence of bondage is particularly severe.

It will be noticed that all except the last item in the package cover agricultural labourers as a whole and not bonded labour only.



APPENDIX - A  
PROFILES OF BONDAGE  
Five Cases

- Bikramaditya Singh

1. Munar Bhuiya

Munar is a Bhuiya (Harijan Caste) from the village of Daho in Ranka block of Palamau district. On the occasion of his marriage he took a loan of RS.140.00 from Bhairo Sao, a son of the merchant Bira Sao from the neighbouring village of Raxi. And from that day on he became a Sevakia (bonded labourer) of the Sao family. He was then fifteen years old.

As a bonded labourer Munar had to report at the master's house by sunrise. During season whether winter or summer he would have to reach the fields with bullocks, ploughs, etc. by 8.00 a.m. in the morning and work through till 4.00 p.m. in the afternoon. He would then return to the master's house for his daily gruel of less than a quarter seer of some coarse grain boiled in salt, after which he had to feed the animals and do other odd jobs till sunset. Munar calculated that he had to work for about twelve hours every day from 7.00 a.m. to 7.00 p.m., with a short break at meal time, as compared to the normal nine hours that a free labourer would work. Yet his



wage was only 2 kaccha seers of grain as compared to 3 kaccha seers of grain for the free labourer (this wage (bani) is exclusive of the meal or Lukma).

With tears in his eyes Munar described the treatment that was meted out to him as being no better than that given to the animals he looked after. Whenever he was reluctant to perform some particularly unpleasant task, or if he came a few minutes after sun rise or left a few minutes before sunset, he would be abused and beaten like the animals.

Recalling a particular incident of such cruelty, Munar mentioned that with excessive hard work his health was deteriorating and he had started getting fever regularly at night. So he stopped going to work. On the third day the malik came to his hut and gave him a sound thrashing. When Munar complained that he was incapable of working the malik threatened to take away the only bullock which his family possessed. When Munar's father resisted the malik left with a warning that he would be back.

Ten days later when Munar had recovered enough to move about he had gone to a market at the neighbouring village of Ramkanda. The malik spotted him there and had him tied by the feet and hands and thrashed till he became unconscious. He was brought home later by his

family when they got the news. Next day the malik turned up again with his men, surrounded the hut and forcibly occupied the one acre of land which Munar possessed. In 1976, after the passing the Bonded Labour System (Abolition) Ordinance, Munar was formally released and the bondage contract declared null and void, but the malik had retained his land. Munar claimed that he had lodged complaints with the local Block Development Officer at Ranka and the Sub-divisional Officer at Garhwa. However till the time when we met him (December 1977) no action had yet been taken.

## 2. Sukan Bhuiya

Sukan Bhuiya is a Harijan from village Chatti in Daltongunge Block. At the age of fifty he is already senile and old, a life of extreme poverty having taken its toll. Sukan's father had been a bonded labourer some forty years ago and Sukan himself has been bonded for the last thirty years. It happened on the day of his marriage when Sukan had taken a loan of 2 maunds of paddy and a pair of dhoti's for the occasion from his malik Raghunath Tiwari of the same village. Since he has no land or any income other than what the malik gives him - and since his pittance of a wage is barely enough to keep body and soul together - Sukan has never been able to "pay back the original loan". And so his contract

requires that he remain bonded. And further if there were someone in his family to replace him after death then that person too must remain bonded until "the loan is paid back".

Like all the other Sevakias of the area, Sukan too has to report at his malik's doorsteps at break of day and work through the day. When he was younger and stronger he used to work on the land. But three years ago the malik has replaced him with a new Harwaha and Sukan has to mind the cattle. He feeds them in the morning and takes them out to graze till the setting of the sun. On his return he is given a meal of about a quarter seer of Sattu (pounded pulses) and one and a half kaccha seers of grain as his wage.

Sukan explained that for the malik it was advantageous in several ways to keep him on as a Sevakia (bonded labourer) rather than employ free labour. His hours of work are longer, his daily wages are less than that of a free labourer and he is always available on hand to do any work the malik wishes to employ him for. And while Sukan slowly withers in his poverty, the malik continues to expand his wealth. A post-master in a local post office, the malik has added some four acres of land to his holdings in recent years, according to Sukan. The expanding wealth is also measured by the size of his

livestock. From an original one pair of bullocks for ploughing Tiwari now owns three pairs and his stock of cows has now expanded from the original three to a total of fourteen.

### 3. Basudeo Chamar

Basudeo, a harijan of the Chamar Caste, hails from the Chamar Tola of Shripalpur in Hariharganj block. A landless labourer, he is the son of Shayama Chamar who originally borrowed Rs.40.00, and again two years later another Rs.60.00, from the Rajput Kariman Singh of the neighbouring village of Madhubana. Shayama Chamar got bonded for the original loan of Rs.40.00 and put in labour services for a total of 14 years, before his son Basudeo took his place in the bondage contract against the same total loan of Rs.100.00. In addition Basudeo's fifteen years old son Naresh has also been working for several years as a Charwaha (animal grazing) against the same debt.

Basudeo explained that his hours of work were not fixed throughout the year. During peak season he worked twelve hours a day. When the work load was less he had to put in ten hours a day. For this labour he used to be given a meal - a gruel of about a quarter seer of grain - and two kaccha seers of grain as a daily wage.

Formally Basudeo has been freed under the Bonded Labour System (abolition) Act and he was even taken to attend a freed bonded labour camp in the district head quarters. But in reality, Basudeo claims, he continues to work under the same malik as a bonded labourer. He would get no employment if he did not agree to this. However one effect of local officials coming to free him, his attending the camp etc. has been that the malik has been frightened into raising his daily wage to three kaccha seers of grain. Also the malik has stopped beating him and abusing him as he used to earlier.

#### 4. Basant Bhuiya

Basant, a sixteen years old Harijan lad from village Chatti in Daltongunge block, became bonded in 1975. According to the terms of the oral agreement the Brahmin malik Gurudeshwar Tiwari, a son of Tulsi Tiwari from the same village, would give Basant a total of three maunds of paddy, some clothes and Rs.55.00 towards other expenses on the occasion of the latter's marriage. In exchange Basant agreed to bond himself to serve the malik as a Harwaha (ploughman) until he could return the loan. Before him his father became a bonded labourer and before his father his grant father also had been a bonded labourer for twenty years.

During season the malik makes Basant work for between ten to twelve hours a day. For this he was paid  $1\frac{1}{2}$  kaccha seers of grain as the daily wage and a gruel consisting of less than a quarter seer of grain as his meal. This is for about eight months of the year when the malik has work for him. During the other four months the malik allows him to work elsewhere, on the roadworks, forests etc., where he earns a slightly higher wage of about Rs.3.00 a day carrying loads, cutting earth etc.

Basant entertains little hope of getting free in the near future. However he pointed out that since he had got bonded recently, after much noise in the district about penalising maliks of bonded labour, the malik at least did not beat or abuse like some of the other maliks used to do. He further explained that inspite of fears of punitive action, the malik wanted to hold Basant in bondage because this way he could get longer hours of work out of him and that too at less than the going daily wage rate for free labourers. Moreover as a bonded labourer Basant was always available at the maliks command unlike free labourers who were not always available when required.

##### 5. Puran Bhuiya

Puran Bhuiya, a landless harijan of Pipra village in Hariharganj block, is bonded to the Rajput Gajadhar



Singh from the same village. It was Puran's grand father who originally became bonded to Gajadhar's father Darogi Singh for a loan of Rs.60.00. When the grand father died the father took his place as a bonded labourer of the malik's family and he took a further loan of Rs.50.00 for his daily consumption needs. Now Puran is forced to work as a bonded labourer against the same total loan of Rs.110.00. And he explained that when he dies his son too would have to replace him in bondage unless they are able to pay off the debt.

Puran has to put in about twelve hours of labour everyday and his wife is also expected to work with him. Each gets a meal of less than a quarter seer of grain and two kaccha seers of grain as the daily wage. If either of them fails to turn up for work they are abused and given a sound thrashing. This happens even when they can't go to work because they are ill.

APPENDIX - B

THE BONDED LABOUR SYSTEM (ABOLITION)  
ACT, 1976

No.19 of 1976

(9th February, 1976)

An Act to provide for the abolition of bonded labour system with a view to preventing the economic and physical exploitation of the weaker sections of the people and for matters connected therewith or incident thereto.

Be it enacted by Parliament in the Twenty-seventh Year of the Republic of India as follows:-

CHAPTER - I

PRELIMINARY

1. (i) This act may be called the Bonded Labour System (Abolition) Act, 1976.

(ii) It extends to the whole of India.

(iii) It shall be deemed to have come into force on the 25th day of October, 1975.

2. In this Act, unless the context otherwise requires:-

(a) "advance" means an advance, whether in cash or in kind, or partly in cash or partly in kind, made by one person (hereinafter referred to as the creditor) to another person (hereinafter referred to as the debtor);

(b) "agreement" means an agreement (whether written or oral, or partly written and partly oral) between a debtor and creditor, and includes an agreement providing

for forced labour, the existence of which is presumed under any social custom prevailing in the concerned locality.

Explanation:- The existence of an agreement between the debtor and creditor is ordinarily presumed, under the social custom, in relation to the following forms of forced labour, namely:-

Adiyamar, Baramasia, Basahya, Bethu, Bhagela, Cherumar, Garru-Galu, Hali, Hari, Harwai, Holya, Jana, Jeetha, Kamiya, Khundit-Mundit, Kuthia, Lakhari, Munjhi, Mat, Munish system, Nit-Majoor, Paleru, Padiyal, Pannayilal, Sagri, Sanji, Sanjawat, Sewak, Sewakia, Seri, Vetti;

(c) "ascendant" or "descendant", in relation to a person belonging to a matriarchal society, means the person who corresponds to such expression in accordance with the law of succession in force in such society;

(d) "bonded debt" means an advance obtained, or presumed to have been obtained, by a bonded labourer under, or in pursuance of, the bonded labour system;

(e) "bonded labour" means any labour or service rendered under the bonded labour system;

(f) "bonded labourer" means a labourer who incurs, or has, or is presumed to have, incurred, a bonded debt;

(g) "bonded labour system" means the system of forced, or partly forced, labour under which a debtor enters, or has, or is presumed to have, entered, into an agreement with the creditor to the effect that, -

(i) in consideration of an advance obtained by him or by any of his lineal ascendants or descendants (whether or not such advance is evidenced by any document) and in consideration of the interest, if any, due on such advance, or

(ii) in pursuance of any customary or social obligation, or

(iii) in pursuance of an obligation devolving on him by succession, or

(iv) for any economic consideration received by him or by any of his lineal ascendants or descendants, or

(v) by reason of his birth in any particular caste or community,

he would -

(1) render, by himself or through any member of his family, or any person dependent on him, labour or service to the creditor, or for the benefit of the creditor, for a specified period or for an unspecified period, either without wages or for nominal wages, or

(2) forfeit the freedom of employment or other means of livelihood for a specified period or for an unspecified period, or

(3) forfeit the right to move freely throughout the territory of India, or

(4) forfeit the right to appropriate or sell at market value any of his property or product of his labour or the labour of a member of his family or any person dependent on him, and includes the system of forced, or partly forced, labour under which a surety for a debtor enters, or has, or is presumed to have, entered, into an agreement with the creditor to the effect that in the event of the failure of the debtor to repay the debt, he would render the bonded labour on behalf of the debtor;

(h) "family", in relation to a person, includes the ascendant and descendant of such person;

(i) "nominal wages", in relation to any labour, means a wage which is less than, -

(a) the minimum wages fixed by the Government in relation to the same or similar labour, under any law for the time being in force, and

(b) where no such minimum wage has been fixed in relation to any form of labour, the wages that are normally paid, for the same or similar labour, to the labourers working in the same locality;

(j) "prescribed" means prescribed by rules made under this Act.

3. The provisions of this Act shall have effect notwithstanding anything inconsistent therewith contained in any enactment other than this Act, or in any instrument having effect by virtue of any enactment other than this Act.

## CHAPTER - II

### ABOLITION OF BONDED LABOUR SYSTEM

4. (1) On the commencement of this Act, the bonded labour system shall stand abolished and every bonded labourer shall, on such commencement, stand freed and discharged from any obligation to render any bonded labour.

(2) After the commencement of this Act, no person shall -

(a) make any advance under, or in pursuance of, the bonded labour system, or

(b) compel any person to render any bonded labour or other form of forced labour.

5. On the commencement of this Act, any custom or tradition or any contract, agreement or other instrument (whether entered into or executed before or after the commencement



of this Act), by virtue of which any person, or any member of the family or dependant of such person, is required to do any work or render any service as a bonded labourer, shall be void and inoperative.

### CHAPTER - III

#### EXTINGUISHMENT OF LIABILITY TO REPAY BONDED DEBT

6. (1) On the commencement of this Act, every obligation of a bonded labourer to repay any bonded debt, or such part of any bonded debt as remains unsatisfied immediately before such commencement, shall be deemed to have been extinguished.

(2) After the commencement of this Act, no suit or other proceeding shall lie in any civil court or before any other authority for the recovery of any bonded debt or any part thereof.

(3) Every decree or order for the recovery of bonded debt, passed before the commencement of this Act and not fully satisfied before such commencement, shall be deemed, on such commencement, to have been fully satisfied.

(4) Every attachment made before the commencement of this Act, for the recovery of any bonded debt, shall, on such commencement, stand vacated; and, where, in pursuance of such attachment, any movable property of the bonded labourer was seized and removed from his custody and kept

in the custody of any court or other authority pending sale thereof, such movable property shall be restored, as soon as may be practicable after such commencement, to the possession of the bonded labourer.

(5) Where, before the commencement of this Act, possession of any property belonging to a bonded labourer or a member of his family or other dependant was forcibly taken over by any creditor for the recovery of any bonded debt, such property shall be restored, as soon as may be practicable after such commencement, to the possession of the person from whom it was seized.

(6) If restoration of the possession of any property referred to in sub-section (4) or sub-section (5) is not made within thirty days from the commencement of this Act, the aggrieved person may, within such time as may be prescribed, apply to the prescribed authority for the restoration of the possession of such property and the prescribed authority may, after giving the creditor a reasonable opportunity of being heard, direct the creditor to restore to the applicant the possession of the concerned property within such time as may be specified in the order.

(7) An order made by any prescribed authority, under sub-section (6), shall be deemed to be an order made by a civil court and may be executed by the court of the lowest pecuniary jurisdiction within the local limits of whose

jurisdiction the creditor voluntarily resides or carries on business or personally works for gain.

(8) For the avoidance of doubts, it is hereby declared that, where any attached property was sold before the commencement of this Act, in execution of a decree or order for the recovery of a bonded debt, such sale shall not be affected by any provision of this Act:

Provided that the bonded labourer, or an agent authorised by him in this behalf, may, at any time within five years from such commencement, apply to have the sale set aside on his depositing in court, for payment to the decree-holder, the amount specified in the proclamation of sale, for the recovery of which the sale was ordered, less any amount, as well as mesne profits, which may, since the date of such proclamation of sale, have been received by the decree-holder.

(9) Where any suit or proceeding, for the enforcement of any obligation under the bonded labour system, including a suit or proceeding for the recovery of any advance made to a bonded labourer, is pending at the commencement of this Act, such suit or other proceeding shall, on such commencement, stand dismissed.

(10) On the commencement of this Act, every bonded labourer who has been detained in civil prison, whether before or after judgement, shall be released from detention forthwith.

7. (1) All property vested in a bonded labourer which was, immediately before the commencement of this Act under any mortgage, charge, lien or other incumbrances in connection with any bonded debt shall, in so far as it is relatable to the bonded debt, stand freed and discharged from such mortgage, charge, lien or other incumbrances, and where any such property was, immediately before the commencement of this Act, in the possession of the mortgage or the holder of the charge, lien or incumbrance, such property shall (except where it was subject to any other charge), on such commencement, be restored to the possession of the bonded labourer.

(2) If any delay is made in restoring any property, referred to in sub-section (1), to the possession of the bonded labourer, such labourer shall be entitled, on and from the date of such commencement, to recover from the mortgage or holder of the lien, charge or incumbrance, such mesne profits as may be determined by the civil court of the lowest pecuniary jurisdiction within the local limits of whose jurisdiction such property is situated.

8. (1) No person who has been freed and discharged under this Act from any obligation to render any bonded labour, shall be evicted from any homestead or other residential premises which he was occupying immediately before the commencement of this Act as part of the consideration for the bonded labour.

(2) If, after the commencement of this Act, any such person is evicted by the creditor from any homestead or other residential premises, referred to in sub-section (1), the Executive Magistrate in charge of the Sub-Division within which such homestead or residential premises is situated shall, as early as practicable, restore the bonded labourer to the possession of such, homestead or other residential premises.

9. (1) No creditor shall accept any payment against any bonded debt which has been extinguished or deemed to have been extinguished or fully satisfied by virtue of the provisions of this Act.

(2) Whoever contravenes the provisions of sub-section (1), shall be punishable with imprisonment for a term which may extend to three years and also with fine.

(3) The court, convicting any person under sub-section (2) may, in addition to the penalties which may be imposed under that sub-section, direct the person to deposit, in court, the amount accepted in contravention of the provisions of sub-section (1), within such period as may be specified in the order for being refunded to the bonded labourer.

CHAPTER - IV

IMPLEMENTING AUTHORITIES

10. The State Government may confer such powers and impose such duties on a District Magistrate as may be necessary to ensure that the provisions of this Act are properly carried out and the District Magistrate may specify the officer, subordinate to him, who shall exercise all or any of the powers, and perform all or any of the duties, so conferred or imposed and the local limits within which such powers or duties shall be carried out by the officer so specified.

11. The District Magistrate authorised by the State Government under section 10 and the officer specified by the District Magistrate under that section shall, as far as practicable, try to promote the welfare of the freed bonded labourer by securing and protecting the economic interests of such bonded labourer so that he may not have any occasion or reason to contract any further bonded debt.

12. It shall be the duty of every District Magistrate and every officer specified by him under section 10 to inquire whether, after the commencement of this Act, any bonded labour system or any other form of forced labour is being enforced by, or on behalf of, any person resident within the local limits of his jurisdiction and if, as a result of such inquiry, any person is found to be enforcing the



bonded labour system or any other system of forced labour, he shall forthwith take such action as may be necessary to eradicate the enforcement of such forced labour.

CHAPTER - V

VIGILANCE COMMITTEES

13. (1) Every State Government shall, by notification in the Official Gazettee, constitute such number of Vigilance Committees in each district and each Sub-Division as it may think fit.

(2) Each Vigilance Committee, constitute for a district, shall consist of the following members, namely:-

(a) the District Magistrate, or a person nominated by him, who shall be the Chairman;

(b) three persons belonging to the Scheduled Castes or Scheduled Tribes and residing in the district, to be nominated by the District Magistrate;

(c) two social workers, resident in the district, to be nominated by the District Magistrate;

(d) not more than three persons to represent the official or non-official agencies in the district connected with rural development, to be nominated by the State Government;

(e) one person to represent the financial and credit institutions in the district, to be nominated by the District Magistrate.

(3) Each Vigilance Committee, constituted for a Sub-Division, shall consist of the following members, namely:-

(a) the Sub-Divisional Magistrate, or a person nominated by him, who shall be the Chairman;

(b) three persons belonging to the Scheduled Castes or Scheduled Tribes and residing in the Sub-Division, to be nominated by the Sub-Divisional Magistrate;

(c) two social workers, resident in the Sub-Division, to be nominated by the Sub-Divisional Magistrate;

(d) not more than three persons to represent the official or non-official agencies in the Sub-Division connected with rural development to be nominated by the District Magistrate;

(e) one person to represent the financial and credit institutions in the Sub-Divisional Magistrate;

(f) one officer specified under section 10 and functioning in the Sub-Division.

(4) Each Vigilance Committee shall regulate its own procedure and secretarial assistance, as may be necessary, shall be provided by -

(a) the District Magistrate, in the case of a Vigilance Committee constituted for the district;

(b) the Sub-Divisional Magistrate, in the case of a Vigilance Committee constituted for the Sub-Division.

(5) No proceeding of a Vigilance Committee shall be invalid merely by reason of any defect in the constitution, or in the proceedings, of the Vigilance Committee.

14. (1) The functions of each Vigilance Committee shall be,-

(a) to advise the District Magistrate or any officer authorised by him as to the efforts made, and action taken, to ensure that the provisions of this Act or of any rule made thereunder are properly implemented;

(b) to provide for the economic and social rehabilitation of the freed bonded labourers;

(c) to co-ordinate the functions of rural banks and co-operative societies with a view to canalising adequate credit to the freed bonded labourer;

(d) to keep an eye on the number of offences of which cognizance has been taken under this Act;

(e) to make a survey as to whether there is any offence of which cognizance ought to be taken under this Act;

(f) to defend any suit instituted against a freed bonded labourer or a member of his family or any other person dependent on him for the recovery of the whole or part of any bonded debt or any other debt which is claimed by such person to be bonded debt.

(2) A Vigilance Committee may authorise one of its members to defend a suit against a freed bonded labourer and the member so authorised shall be deemed, for the purpose of such suit, to be the authorised agent of the freed bonded labourer.

15. Whenever any debt is claimed by a bonded labourer, or a Vigilance Committee, to be a bonded debt, the burden of proof that such debt is not a bonded debt shall lie on the creditor.

#### CHAPTER - VI

##### OFFENCES AND PROCEDURE FOR TRIAL

16. Whoever, after the commencement of this Act, compels any person to render any bonded labour shall be punishable with imprisonment for a term which may extend to three years and also with fine which may extend to two thousand rupees.

17. Whoever advances, after the commencement of this Act, any bonded debt shall be punishable with imprisonment for a term which may extend to three years and also with fine which may extend to two thousand rupees.

18. Whoever enforces, after the commencement of this Act, any custom, tradition, contract, agreement or other instrument, by virtue of which any person or any member of the family of such person or any dependant of such person is

required to render any service under the bonded labour system, shall be punishable with imprisonment for a term which may extend to three years and also with fine which may extend to two thousand rupees; and out of the fine, if recovered, payment shall be made to the bonded labourer at the rate of rupees five for each day for which the bonded labour was extracted from him.

19. Whoever, being required by this Act to restore any property to the possession of any bonded labourer, omits or fails to do so, within a period of thirty days from the commencement of this Act, shall be punishable with imprisonment for a term which may extend to one year, or with fine which may extend to one thousand rupees, or with both; and, out of the fine, if recovered, payment shall be made to the bonded labourer at the rate of rupees five for each day during which possession of the property was not restored to him.

20. Whoever abets any offence punishable under this Act shall, whether or not the offence abetted is committed, be punishable with the same punishment as is provided for the offence which has been abetted.

Explanation:- For the purpose of this Act, "abetment" has the meaning assigned to it in the Indian Penal Code.

21. (1) The State Government may confer, on an Executive Magistrate, the powers of a Judicial Magistrate of the first

class or of the second class for the trial of offences under this Act; and, on such conferment of powers, the Executive Magistrate, on whom the powers are so conferred, shall be deemed, for the purposes of the Code of Criminal Procedure, 1973, to be a Judicial Magistrate of the first class, or of the second class, as the case may be.

(2) An offence under this Act may be tried summarily by a Magistrate.

22. Every offence under this Act shall be cognizable and bailable.

23. (1) Where an offence under this Act has been committed by a company, every person who, at the time the offence was committed, was in charge of, and was responsible to, the company for the conduct of the business of the company, as well as the company, shall be deemed to be guilty of the offence and shall be liable to be proceeded against and punished accordingly.

(2) Notwithstanding anything contained in subsection (1), where any offence under this Act has been committed by a company and it is proved that the offence has been committed with the consent or connivance of, or is attributable to, any neglect on the part of, any director, manager, secretary or other officer of the company, such director, manager, secretary or other officer shall be deemed to be guilty of that offence



and shall be liable to be proceeded against and punished accordingly.

Explanation:- For the purposes of this section, -

(a) "company" means any body corporate and includes a firm or other association of individuals; and

(b) "director", in relation to a firm, means a partner in the firm.

#### CHAPTER - VII

24. No suit, prosecution or other legal proceeding shall lie against any State Government or any officer of the State Government or any member of the Vigilance Committee for anything which is in good faith done or intended to be done under this Act.

25. No civil court shall have jurisdiction in respect of any matter to which any provision of this Act applies and no injunction shall be granted by any civil court in respect of anything which is done or intended to be done by or under this Act.

26. (1) The Central Government may, by notification in the Official Gazette, make rules for carrying out the provisions of this Act.

(2) In particular, and without prejudice to the foregoing power, such rules may provide for all or any of the following matters, namely:-

(a) the authority to which application for the restoration of possession of property referred to in sub-section (4), or sub-section (5), of section 6 is to be submitted in pursuance of sub-section (6) of that section;

(b) the time within which application for restoration of possession of property is to be made, under sub-section (6) of section 6, to the prescribed authority;

(c) steps to be taken by Vigilance Committees under clause (a) of sub-section (1) of section 14, to ensure the implementation of the provisions of this Act or of any rule made thereunder;

(d) any other matter which is required to be, or may be, prescribed.

(3) Every rule made by the Central Government under this Act shall be laid, as soon as may be after it is made, before each House of Parliament while it is in session, for a total period of thirty days which may be comprised in one session or in two or more successive sessions, and if, before the expiry of the session immediately following the session or successive sessions aforesaid, both Houses agree in making any modification in the rule or both Houses agree that the rule should

not be made, the rule shall thereafter have effect only in such modified form or be of no effect, as the case may be; so, however, that any such modification or annulment shall be without prejudice to the validity of anything previously done under that rule.

27. (1) The Bonded Labour System (Abolition) Ordinance, 1975 is hereby repealed.

(2) Notwithstanding such repeal, anything done or any action taken under the Ordinance (including any notification published, direction or nomination made, power conferred, duty imposed or officer specified) shall be deemed to have been done or taken under the corresponding provisions of this Act.

APPENDIX - C

CENTRALLY SPONSORED SCHEME FOR THE REHABILITATION OF BONDED LABOUR, 1978-79 - (A) GUIDELINES FOR PREPARATION OF SCHEMES BY THE STATE GOVERNMENTS AND (B) FOR REGULATING GRANT OF CENTRAL FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE TO THE STATES/ UNION TERRITORIES UNDER THE SCHEMES.

(A) Guidelines for preparing Schemes for the Rehabilitation of Bonded Labour.

I. BACKGROUND INFORMATION

1. There should be a short description of physical and/economic conditions including tenurial conditions wage level and cash composition of areas where the bonded labour have been identified and released.
2. Name, place of residence, village, Mohalla, Thana, Taluk, District, person under whom they were bonded, date of identification/release and short write-up on the asset endowment of the released bonded labourer may be given in a statement form attached to every rehabilitation scheme. This information will be necessary for the evaluating teams to identify the beneficiaries when they go for appraisal of the rehabilitation schemes.
3. Details of the immediate minimum relief necessary, person-wise/family wise for each released bonded labourer should be given. Nature and the kind of relief should be mentioned, possibility of repeating relief dose in a

diminished way in future should also be indicated.

Administrative support to prevent lapsing back into bondage should be mentioned.

## II. REHABILITATION SCHEME

### (a) LAND BASED:

(i) Identification of land - Government land/ceiling surplus land;

(ii) Allotment preferably in the village where the bonded labour ordinarily resides or is liberated to prevent parting from the social milieu or prevent antagonism from other villages;

(iii) Identification of the delivery system of inputs - credit facilities, seeds, water supply, agricultural implements, draught animals, fertilisers;

(iv) Need, if any, of reclamation and development of the assigned lands.

### (b) NON-LAND

(i) Milch cattle, cows, buffaloes - suitable for the area;

(ii) Pigs, goats, sheep dependent upon the social sensibilities of the bonded labour released and the physical environment;

(iii) Ensure minimum veterinary cover from the existing/extension of veterinary services.

(iv) Institutional linking up for marketing.

(c) SKILL/CRAFT BASED OCCUPATIONS:

(i) Identification of skill/craft;

(ii) Supply of raw materials, implements, working capital, work shed;

(iii) Linking with market through cooperative or other State-aided institutions to eliminate exploitation by private middlemen.

4. Detailed financial implication in respect of each of the item mentioned in paragraph 4 in the three alternative schemes in form of a statement - names of the beneficiaries and allotments should be clearly shown in order to enable the evaluation team to carry out further follow-up action.

III. SELECTION OF AREA

5. The rehabilitation schemes, under the Centrally Sponsored Scheme, with matching grant from the concerned State Government, may initially be drawn for areas where there is concentration of bonded labour and which would have been left out otherwise under various approved Plan-schemes or where these Plan Schemes are inadequate for providing rehabilitation to the released bonded labour.



(B) Guidelines for Regulating grant of Central financial assistance to the States under the Scheme.

6. The Schemes of rehabilitation received from the State Governments for availing of financial assistance under the Centrally Sponsored Scheme shall conform to the 'guide-lines' drawn for the purpose and shall be formulated for areas where either there is non-on going scheme or where they are any, these are inadequate to take care of the rehabilitation of the released bonded labour in that area.

7. The Scheme received from the State Governments shall be examined, scrutinised and approved by a Committee of Officers at the Centre, having representatives from the Ministry of Labour, Department of Rural Development and the Planning Commission. The Committee shall also specify the amount of Centre's share in respect of each Scheme approved by it. The Committee may visit the area of the Scheme being implemented with Centre's assistance so as to have a mid-term review of the progress of implementation of the Schemes.

8. The Schemes approved for Central Assistance would be financed on a matching-grant basis, i.e. 50% by the State and 50% by the Centre of the total outlay of the approved Scheme. The over-head cost on providing the execution machinery for the Scheme shall be borne by the State Government. The execution-machinery responsible

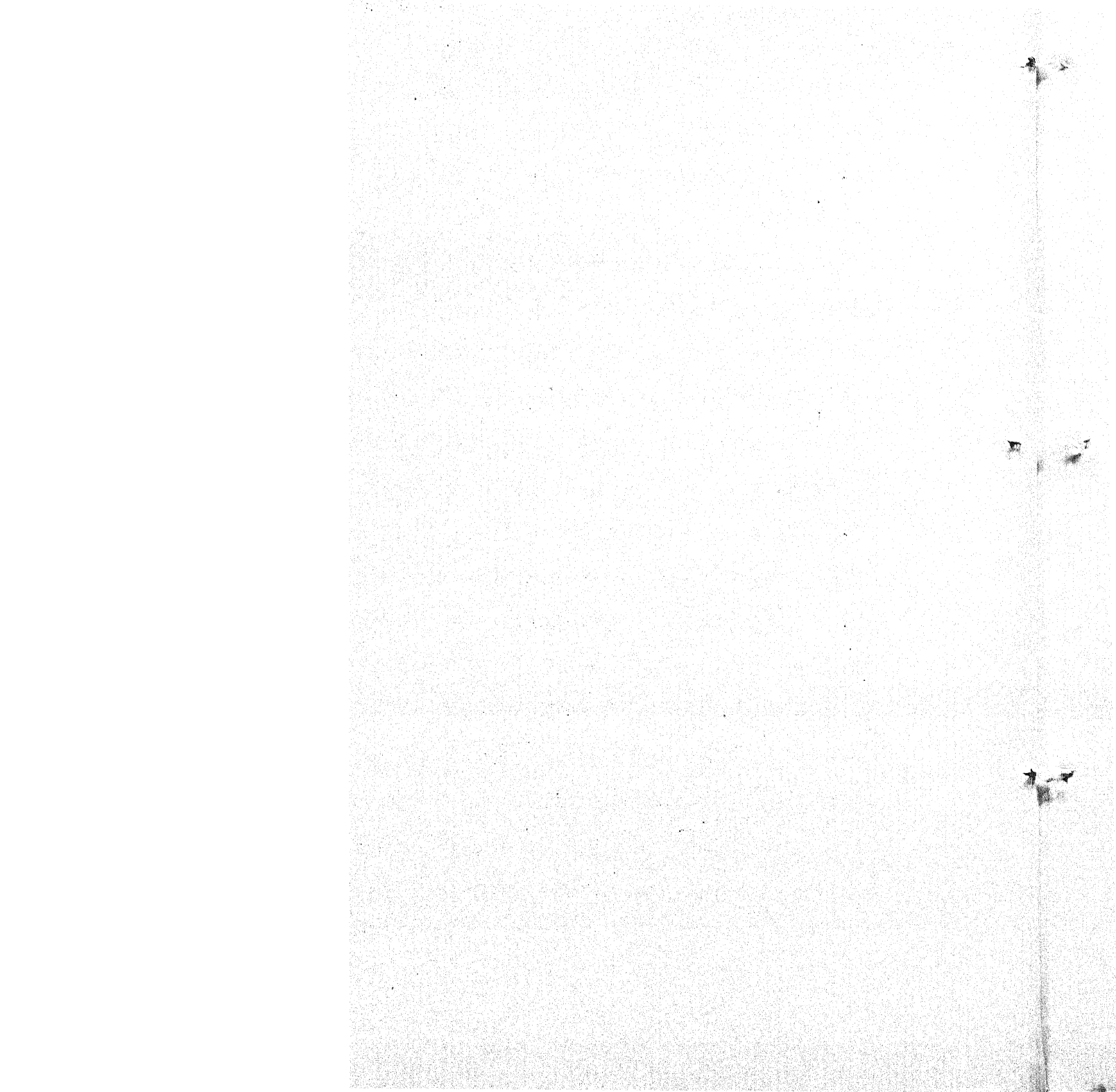
for the implementation of the Scheme shall be stipulated in the Scheme by the State Government.

9. Twenty-five per cent (25%) of the Centre's share in respect of each Scheme shall be released immediately after the approval of the Scheme. The balance of Centre's share shall be released in 3 equal instalments in August, 1978; November, 1978 and February, 1979.

10. The States shall be responsible for the submission of quarterly progress reports, on the prescribed proforma (will follow) on the implementation of the Scheme along-with a detailed account of item-wise expenditure during the preceding quarter. For this purpose the States shall nominate a Liaison Officer, in respect of each Scheme, who shall be responsible for the submission of these reports in time.

11. The Schemes drawn would be such as would be capable of implementation and completion by March, 1979.

12. The State Governments shall be responsible for submission, within three months of the expiry of the financial year 1978-79, an audited account of the expenditure in respect of each of the rehabilitation Scheme financed with Central Assistance. It shall be the responsibility of the State Governments to decide the form and procedure to keep proper accounts and to get them audited in time.



APPENDIX - D

WINE SHOP TO PRIMARY SCHOOL\*

- Basuki Nath Singh

At the time when he built his wine shop, the wine merchant of Ram Kanda could not have known that one day his shop would become a home away from home for our team of researchers. But by the time we got to Ram Kanda many things had changed and the wine shop had now become a beautiful school - our home for the entire period that we spent in this area.

The village of Ram Kanda located in the western edge of Palamau District in the south-western corner of Bihar, is a central place which serves as a major trading centre for the villages of the area. A hilly track covered with thick forests, the area is rich in timber, lac, khair, fruits and other forest products. Much of this finds its way to the weekly haat in Ram Kanda - from where it is picked up by the traders. These same traders, who buy

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The author, who belongs to the Indian Institute of Public Administration, thanks Dr. Sudipto Mundle for help in preparing this note from shared experiences.

the local produce at throw away prices and sell it outside at a huge profit, bring in grain, pulses, oil, salt and other essentials, which they sell to the impoverished tribals of the area at inflated prices.

Ram Kanda is, therefore, a confluence of people and exchange - a meeting place for both exploiter and the exploited. And so it is also the local centre of entertainment - fairs, festivals, jatras and the wine shop.

The only big bhatti in this area, the wine shop of Ram Kanda, was a profitable enterprise for many years. The merchants and moneylenders came here to squander their illgotten gains, while the local poor - poor peasants and landless labourers - came here to drown their miseries in a bottle of mahua at the end of a day's labour. A calming palliative for the wretched, this wine from the sweet smelling mohua flower is at the same time a further source of exploitation of the poor.

Many a story of utter ruination as well as feuds and violence began at the bhatti. So, the shop was closed down during Emergency in 1976. The local BDO, himself an enterprising Harijan, immediately took over the premises to build a primary school. For sometime the Welfare Department of the district had been working on

a scheme to build a school exclusively for the children of freed bonded labourers.

Ram Kanda and the villages around having witnessed a fairly strong drive for freeing bonded labour, once again thanks to the local BDO, Sarjug Ram, as well as sympathetic Collectors at the district headquarters, the bhatti of Ram Kanda became an obvious choice. And so it came to pass that what was once a wine shop was now transformed into a school for the children of bonded labourers. Probably the first and the only one of its kind in the country.

For those of us in the cities who take literacy for granted the setting up of a miserable little primary school in the remote village may not be much of an event. But for the children of the wretched in those parts, the school is indeed a total transformation of their lives. For, we must remember that these are the children of the poorest of the poor in one of the most backward areas of the world.

The word poverty comes easily to us, but we can seldom imagine what it really means. In Ram Kanda, when times are good, the labouring population may work from dawn to dusk and earn on the average about Rs.50 a month for a family of four.



For about six months in the year they can earn nothing at all. Roots from the forest boiled in salt water is all they have to survive. This harsh exploitation by moneylenders, merchants and landowners which leads to such unimaginable depths of poverty is based to a large extent on the simplicity and sheer ignorance of the local tribals and Harijans.

Literacy in such circumstances can be a powerful weapon of the oppressed - the dividing line between conscious opposition and a creeping death. And so we find that for the ragged little children of the area this modest little school represents a total transformation of their lives.

Of course, this unusual little school for such unusual students might never come to anything without the initiative of two exceptional young teachers who had the courage and imagination to translate a simple idea into a momentous reality. Coming themselves from a deprived tribal background, Thomas Topno and Lucas Topno are aware of the fundamental importance of education in the liberation of the wretched.

After their own schooling in a mission at Ranchi, both Lucas and Thomas joined the Bihar Primary Education Service as school teachers. On being given charge of

setting up the school, they approached their assignment as a challenge.

The first task they set themselves was to convert the odious structure of the bhatti into the pleasant hygienic layout of a residential school.

Half of the main corridor which housed the brewing stills was converted into a large kitchen-cum-dining room of the school. The other half of it became a class room. The wings leading off from this corridor on the two sides of the open quadrangle, which used to be wine stores, were converted into dormitories for the children. The rims of earthen wine jars can still be seen embedded in the floors.

The rooms enclosing the quadrangle along the front which were once used as cash counters and the office of the bhatti manager, now serve as rooms for the teachers. There is a guest room and also a larder-cum-bedroom for the school cook.

From the modest budget provided by the District Welfare Department for a total of fifty students, each student has been provided in the dormitory with his own little bed and built-in drawer where he keeps his modest personal belongings. Dari, bed-sheet, mosquito nets and blankets have also been provided. In addition, each child is provided with a gamchha, shirt, vest and a pair of pants every year. For their day-to-day consumption

a total of Rs.780 per annum is provided for each child as per the following breakdown:

Food	Rs.720.00
Oil, Soda, Hair cutting etc.	Rs. 30.00
Book grant	Rs. 30.00

The remaining portion of the annual budget has been utilised to acquire a small stock of kitchen utensils, musical equipment and games-equipment for the children.

Meals are prepared by the children themselves. For breakfast, boiled gram is served. Lunch includes rice, pulses and vegetable. Dinner also includes vegetable and pulses along with bread. Meat is served once a month, and fish is sometimes supplied free from a local fishbreeding scheme.

The daily routine begins every morning at 5 a.m. with a session of devotional songs and prayers. Though they are themselves Christians, the teachers have a secular outlook and they teach the children to pray in their own Hindu tradition.

Prayers are followed by a period of homework up to 6.30, when the children go for their toilet and bath. The school well serves as the bathing ghat and the main water supply, while drinking water is brought from outside

by water carriers. After their toilet some children help the cook in the kitchen while others sweep and clean the school.

Light refreshments are served at 8.30 which is, oddly enough, followed by lunch at 9.30. Class begins at about 10.00 and continues till 4.00 p.m. with a half hour break from 1.30 to 2.00 p.m. We suggested to the teachers that either the lunch or the light refreshment might be served to the children during this break.

After class, the children are given some light refreshment which is followed by a session of games. It was interesting to watch how the children left aside their hockey sticks, carrom-boards, ludo sets, etc. from the cities to play their own games of Kabbadi and luko-chori. After evening prayers there is again a session of home work until 8.30 p.m. when children have their dinner and go to bed.

It was exciting to note in this ordinary routine of school a profound change for the children which would open up for them a new world of experiences and ideas - a whole new culture - which neither their fathers nor their forefathers could have ever dreamt of. But we could not help noticing at the same time some extremely disturbing aspects of this process of transformation.

When the school started out in 1976, the teachers had to trek to distant villages to plead with doubting parents - bonded labourers all - that they send their children started arriving, they would frequently run away and go back home for the discipline and new experiences appeared to them to be both alien and formidable.

But within a year this has all changed. It is now their own homes, their own parents and their less fortunate brothers and sisters from whom they feel increasingly alienated. The school is now more attractive. It offers many friends to play with, many exciting things to learn and, above all, a bed, clothes and food. Two square meals a day is a luxury unheard of among the bonded of Palamau.

This is indeed a serious problem. Many of the children felt little need to think of home. One could even trace in their innocent conversations a certain distaste for their homes and an expectation of a better life.

But the prospects of a better material life for any of them is bleak. The school is so far only a temporary project with an extremely restricted budget. There is no money even to pay the cook who works gratis. There are no proper plans to expand the school so that the children might move up from one class to another. Most of them will have to return to the life of an agricultural



labourer - wretched even if not bonded.

And if one or two of the luckier ones find themselves in high classes in other schools with stipends of scholarships from the Government, they too will probably return to the life of an agricultural labourer for lack of contacts or any support to find alternative employment in an already saturated market for non-agricultural jobs. And this return will be all the more painful for their brief experience of material well being and a life of relative human dignity.

Their present course of education in the hackneyed, dysfunctional, syllabus of our primary school system prepares them in no way for this readjustment of their new culture to a continuing life of material poverty and back-breaking toil. It prepares them in no way to recognise the circumstances of their wretchedness, nor to find a means of collectively breaking out of it.

The more we watched them, the more we sought for a pedagogy of the oppressed and prayed for a Makarenko of our own.





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